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THE TIMES OF INDIA

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CELEBRATING EID-UL-FITR

INDIA'S LARGEST ENGLISH NEWSPAPER

At a White House meeting with Japanese PM Sanae Takaichi, US President Trump **links his decision to not warn Japan about strikes on Iran to "surprise," draws comparisons to WWII Pearl Harbor attack**, leaving her aghast

N Korean leader **Kim Jong Un's teenage daughter was seen driving an army tank with her father sitting behind** in latest photos; earlier this month, she was seen aiming a rifle & shooting a handgun

Aus pacers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc & Josh Hazlewood will miss the IPL matches due to busy schedule; England all rounder **Sam Curran will miss IPL campaign following a groin injury**

Three teenagers in Tennessee sue Elon Musk's xAI, alleging its image tools created explicit content from their photos, with one plaintiff alerting in Dec that such images were being shared on a social media website

Singed by Iran fire, ₹ drops 108p in single session, worst fall in 4 years

At All-Time Low Of 93.7/$; Forecasters Predict 95+ Level In Six Months

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The rupee fell to a record low of 93.71 on Friday, dropping 108 paise from its previous close of 92.63, marking its sharpest single-day decline in four years, as fears of oil prices staying above $100 for longer intensified with the West Asia conflict widening to attacks on energy infrastructure in the region.

Forecasters are now talking about the rupee breaching 95 levels in the next six months. "We continue to expect the rupee to remain under pressure, reflecting a likely balance of payments deficit and a large net short forward book, which has likely exceeded the last published estimate of around US$62 billion (Dec 2025)," said Santanu Sengupta, chief India economist at Goldman Sachs, in a recent report.

"There is no sign of de-escalation in the Middle East, with Brent touching $116 (a barrel) yesterday (Thursday) and now around $106... There is also no end to FII sell-off in the equity market, with a net sell of approximately Rs 80,000 crore, which is more than $8.5 billion, from March 1 till yesterday. This adds more pressure to the falling rupee," said K N Dey, a forex consultant. He added that there is huge year-end demand for dollars and, unless there is de-escalation, the pressure would continue.

With energy supply disrupted and prices of oil and gas soaring, a weaker rupee adds to the pressure on inflation, which, at 3.2% in Feb, is currently within the tolerance zone. Economists are worried that a prolonged conflict will push up prices of commodities. Market players said that RBI has been intervening in the market to arrest a steep slide, but it has had limited impact. Spending by Indians on overseas education and travel is already declining because of visa restrictions and geopolitics, and the unfavourable exchange rate is expected to be another factor.

So far, 2025-26 is the worst financial year for the rupee in the last decade. The only other financial year when the rupee has depreciated more in absolute terms was 2008-09, when the rupee weakened by 1,058 paise against the US dollar.

FULL COVERAGE
P 8, 10, 11 & Othr bk P 10
▶Iran threatens to target tourism sites, Other Bk, P10
▶Weakened by 266p, P 11

PM dials Bahrain king, stresses open, safe shipping lines

PM Modi's ongoing engagement with Gulf countries continued Friday as he spoke to Bahrain King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and condemned attacks on the energy and civilian infrastructure in the region, underscoring their adverse impact on global food, fuel and fertiliser security. "We discussed the current situation in the West Asian region. Reiterated the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation and keeping shipping lines open and secure," said Modi on X. TNN

OIL RELIEF ON US, ISRAEL ASSURANCES

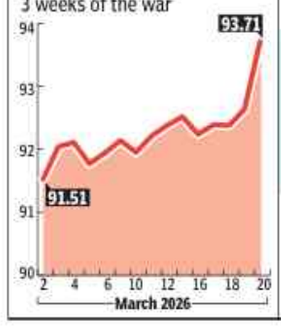
Photo: AP

A bride and her family take cover in a bomb shelter after an alert in Ramat Gan, Israel, on Thursday

- Oil prices drop as US president Trump says he's 'not putting troops anywhere' while PM Netanyahu says Israel will refrain from more attacks on Iranian energy facilities
- However, **US military deploying thousands of addl Marines and sailors to West Asia**, three US officials told Reuters. No decision yet on sending troops into Iran
- Iran continues to hit energy infrastructure in the Gulf. **Several units of Kuwait's Al Ahmadi refinery were shut** after a drone attack caused a fire
- **Sensex climbs 326 points or 0.4%** to settle at 74,533pts Friday
- India's **weekly LPG imports fall to 2.7 lakh metric tonnes in week ending March 19**, from 3.2 lakh mt on March 5. West Asia inflows decline to just 89,000 mt in week ending March 19, the **lowest share since Jan 2026**
- **Price of premium petrol has gone up by ₹2 per litre**, while **bulk diesel** sold to industrial users will cost **₹22 more** per litre. No change in prices of normal petrol & diesel

Rupee vs Dollar

The US-Israel attacks on Iran began Feb 28, and ₹ has weakened by 266 paise in the 3 weeks of the war



Indian capt of crude vessel stranded in Hormuz dies

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Ranchi: Stuck in the Persian Gulf for 20 days after Iran shut down Strait of Hormuz, Rakesh Ranjan Singh, an Indian merchant navy captain tasked with steering an oil tanker out, died on March 18 after a heart attack on the vessel, his family said Friday.

Rakesh, 47, fell off his chair on the captain's deck on the Panama-flagged ASP Avana. Medics on board said he needed immediate attention in hospital but with the war raging, there was no immediate help possible, his family claimed. "We were informed by his employer, Elegant Marine Services Private Limited, that they tried to evacuate him for medical care. But the ongoing tension caused a delay. When they finally moved him to a hospital in Port Rashid, UAE, doctors declared him dead on arrival," said family friend and naval officer Sanjeev Kumar.

▶Was fit: Brother, P 8

F-35 first US jet to be hit by Iranian fire

A US F-35 stealth warplane was hit by suspected Iranian fire and made an emergency landing at American air base in West Asia, US media reported Thursday. US has lost multiple aircraft during the conflict — including three F-15s mistakenly shot down by Kuwaiti forces, and a KC-135 refuelling aircraft that crashed in Iraq — but none known to have been hit by Iranian fire. **Other book, P 10**

Sri Lanka refused US request to land warplanes

Sri Lanka refused permission for two US warplanes to land in the southeast Mattala airport on March 4 and 8, President Dissanayake told Parliament Friday. "They wanted to bring in two warplanes armed with eight anti-ship missiles...we said no. The war poses challenges but we will do everything possible to remain neutral," he said. AFP

UP youth killed in missile strike in Riyadh, say kin

A family in Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur has claimed their 26-year-old son was killed in a missile strike in Riyadh on March 18 and sought govt help to bring his body back. Ravi Gopal had been working at a plastic factory in the Saudi capital since Sept 2025. He was killed while speaking to his wife over phone, his brother said. "He called around 8.20pm (Indian time) and was talking normally. After some time, the call disconnected. We heard a loud explosion in the background before the phone went dead." **Other Bk, P 10**

Wrong Boeing sent to Canada, AI plane returns after 9 hrs

Aircraft Was In Chinese Airspace When Called Back

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New Delhi: A Vancouver-bound Air India aircraft going via the east — and not even taking the Gulf war zone route — had to return to Delhi after nearly nine hours of flying on Thursday.

The reason: according to senior officials, as of now, AI's Boeing 777-300 extended range (ER) fleet has the clearance to operate to Canada, not the B777-200 long-range (LR) version. On Thursday, however, the airline sent one of its B777 LR (VT-AEI) to Vancouver from Delhi as AI185 with a full planeload of passengers.

Only when the aircraft had flown for over four hours and was in Chinese airspace near Kunming did the airline realise its costly mistake. It called the aircraft back to Delhi where, according to flight tracking sites, it landed at 7.19pm Thursday after taking off earlier in the day at 11.34am. The airline is learnt to have taken serious note of the lapse and action is being contemplated against those responsible.

▶Costly error, P 8

Space shrinks for western air routes

The "usable" corridor in West Asia, a key route for flights between India and Europe, UK and North America, is shrinking as the war theatre expands. AI Friday changed its route slightly to fly more to the southern side of S Arabia, adding another 20-30 minutes to its long flights. **P 8**

Vet dies of injuries after a pregnant hippo attacks her in Shivamogga zoo

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Shivamogga: A newly recruited veterinarian died Friday after a pregnant hippopotamus lunged at her during a routine health check at Shivamogga zoo late Thursday night.

Expressing deep sorrow, forest minister Eshwar B Khandre announced Rs 30 lakh in immediate compensation and ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident. Zoo director V M Amarakshar said Dr Sameeksha Reddy visited the zoo hospital around 10.30pm Thursday for follow-up treatment of a sun conure, a bird. Around 11.45pm, she entered the enclosure of a pregnant hippo to monitor its temperature using a thermal camera.

Dr Sameeksha Reddy posted a photo with the hippo in Feb

▶Damage to lungs, Other Bk, P 5

Criticising top court's rulings is no affront to judiciary: SC

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New Delhi: Ten days after imposing life ban on academic work of authors for what it considered an unwarranted reference to 'corruption in judiciary' in school textbooks, the Supreme Court on Friday said criticisms of judgments, irrespective of their severity, do not amount to an affront to judiciary.

PIL petitioner Pankaj Pushkar, associated with NCERT in preparing textbooks, informed a bench of CJI Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi that while the court had ordered redaction of the controversial reference to corruption in judiciary, parts in other books that show judiciary in poor light continue to be taught.

▶People have right, P 6

CEC, EC selection law: CJI recuses from hearing PIL

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant has stepped aside from hearing petitions challenging a 2023 law on selecting the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, citing "conflict of interest".

The law had altered the composition of a three-member panel earlier devised by the SC to plug a legislative gap, and replaced the CJI in the panel—alongside the PM and the Leader of the Opposition—with a cabinet minister.

Earlier, the Union govt had the sole prerogative over the appointments. **P 6**

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GOING LOCO OVER LOCOS:
RAILFANS HOOKED TO THE TRACKS

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For crores of Indians, trains are a practical travel medium due to vast connectivity and cost effectiveness. But for a small, passionate community, the railways are more than transport - they are a lifelong passion and fascination.

Railfanning, the practice of observing, photographing, filming, or documenting trains and railway systems, has seen a surge in popularity in Bengaluru. At KSR Bengaluru railway station on any given evening, it is easy to spot rail buffs quietly sitting on platforms taking notes on locomotives, or coaches, absorbed in their pursuit of even minuscule details linked to railway systems.

Childhood Spark Turns Into Lifelong Hobby

For many railfans, interest in all things connected to trains starts early. For Soumik R, a resident of Byappanahalli, this fascination started during his childhood in Ballari. "I always used to like travelling on trains from when I was a kid. Though Ballari was just an hour from Toranagallu, where I lived at the time, my father would still choose trains because of me. That's how my love for trains started," he recalls.

By 2017, weekends for 15-year-old Soumik meant photographing trains passing by his neighbourhood. He found his community of super railfans on the internet. "It was basically like a forum where people discussed, posted and debated about Indian trains. I started to click on profiles of other railfans and connected with people who have shared the same passion."

His move to Bengaluru for higher education helped deepen his interest. "I saved my college stipends to buy a camera for quality photographs," he says, adding that the Byappanahalli and KSR railway stations are his favourites for photographing trains. "The Byappanahalli station is actually curved, so when particular diesel locomotives pass through there, I get really aesthetic pictures and videos."

His passion has taken him to several parts of the country to explore the diverse rail network. "I still have a lot of things pending on my bucket list. Specifically, I want to go to Araku Valley, that line comes under the East Coast Railway between Kotavalsa and Kirandul. The route is very scenic - India's first Vistadome started from that route," he says.

A Community Growing Online And Offline

As short-form video content boomed across social media, railfans have found a wider audience. Sumant Atreyas, who lives in east Bengaluru, posts Kannada-language content on his Instagram handle "sumant_sbc". Living just 2 km from KR Puram railway station, Sumant grew up with constant train hooting and the rhythm of passing trains.

"My grandparents used to take me to Krishnarajapuram railway station," he recalls. "I used to take my books and do my homework there, have lunch, and have long chats with the staff there."

He remembers trainspotting at a level crossing near the Hoodi railway station, where the gateman was a classmate of his grandfather.

For railfans like Sumant, rare coaches and locomotives are a significant attraction. Even the liveries of locomotives, such as different kinds of paint, portraits and advertisements, are also a major draw. Trains from distant states, like the Palace Queen Humsafar Express from Rajasthan, often bring rare and unique locomotives not usually seen in Bengaluru, making these prized sightings for railfans.

Priya Saha and her son Vihaan Behera were invited to the Krishnarajapuram loco shed recently

Sumant's most memorable moment as a railfan was during the Covid-19 pandemic. "Railways used to help supply liquid oxygen during the pandemic. A special train, called Oxygen Express, used to transport liquid oxygen from various parts to Bengaluru. I used to visit the railway station every two to three days and once I spotted one of the Jamalpur Alco (locomotives designed by the American Locomotive Company) which were completely removed from service. That is the rarest in my collection."

City's Youngest Rail Aficionado

While many railfans are encyclopaedias of technical railway knowledge, for others train watching is the real passion. Among the second group is Vihaan Behera - just two-and-a-half years old – and perhaps the city's youngest rail enthusiast.

Vihaan, who lives a short distance from the Kodigehalli station, rarely misses a day of trainspotting. His mother, Priya Saha, a play-school teacher, says his passion has made trainspotting an integral part of her life.

"It all started last December when we took a MEMU to Mysuru from Kodigehalli. He started noticing all the passing trains and wouldn't take his eyes off the tracks," recalls Priya. Amazed by Vihaan's passion, Priya started uploading Vihaan's railfanning vlogs to her Instagram account, which quickly went viral.

"Bandhe Bharat," Vihaan screams whenever he sees the Yeswanthpur-Kacheguda Vande Bharat Express passing through the station. "This Hyderabad train is something he can never miss, and we spot it almost every day passing through. At the age of two, he can already identify different types of trains."

Recently, Vihaan was invited to the Krishnarajapuram Diesel Shed, which his parents feel was a rewarding moment. "I don't think a lot of people get to see loco sheds. The railway engineers have been very supportive of Vihaan. He also entered locomotives and goods trains, which is very rare for most people."

Priya, from the Nadia district of West Bengal, came to Bengaluru to work as a bartender. "I feel, I've learnt so much about trains, their schedules, and technicalities, that I can call myself a rail fan as well because of this gentleman," she says gesturing towards her toddler.

FAN FAVOURITES

Some of the locomotives, which have been phased out, are still a rage among the railfans.

The **WAG-6,** according to rail enthusiasts, was a star of the late 1980s - imported from Sweden and Japan, its aesthetics and unique wheel arrangements made it a rare sight before its recent retirement a decade ago.

For decades, **Alcos** were the heartbeat of Indian Railways ever since the colonial era, their simple design allowed for easy maintenance, bridging the gap before electrification and defining an era of nostalgic rail travel.

The **WDM-2A,** another Alco, was the backbone of the nation for decades, and now sadly has been relegated to shunting or museums.

The **WDM-3F** represented the final, most powerful evolution of the Alco engine, with a futuristic aerodynamic roof that signaled the end of an era.

The **WDP-3A** was the high-speed star of the Konkan Railway. With its dual-cab design mimicking an electric loco, its retirement has left a void in the scenic coastal stretches it once dominated.

A railfan from K'taka having his fan moment

RAILFANS AND RAILWAYS

Karnataka now has several railfan groups, and some even include the South Western Railway (SWR) officials. Pavan H Somannavar, from the SWR's public relations department, is a popular figure among railfans. "There are several groups of railfans, and the SWR zone also has set up a group to communicate with them. To support their passion, whenever there is an inaugural run of a special train like Vande Bharat, we provide souvenir tickets and whatever information they require," says Pavan. Railfans have helped the zone in terms of publicity and the positive awareness they provide outside, says the SWR official. "Even if there are some issues within the zone or trains, railfans inform us and we immediately carry forward the recommendation to the concerned officials. There have been several cases where issues were rectified because of them."

Ramanavami brings back the splendour of classical music to B'luru

Sree Ramanavami Global Music Festival — one of Bengaluru's longest running and most popular classical music festivals – is all set to return for its 88th edition.

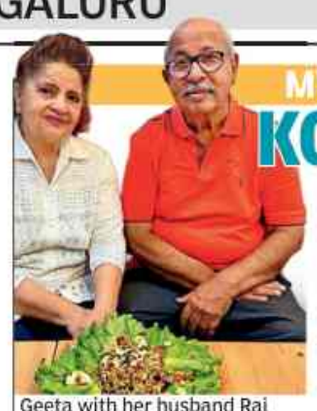
The festival continues to remain immensely popular for several reasons, notably its unique almost month-long format that features some of the most renowned musicians from across the country. Equally distinctive is the open-air pandal in which the festival is conducted, a setting that has made classical music accessible to the wider public and brought it closer to the common listener.

True to its tradition, the festival, to be held from March 27 to April 22, has an impressive lineup which includes Sudha Raghunathan, Pandit Venkatesh Kumar, Dr N Rajam, Ranjani Gayatri, Abhishek Raghuram, Sandeep Narayan, Harish Sivaramakrishnan (Agam band), Mandolin U Rajesh, Malladi Brothers, Dushyanth Sridhar and Vinay Varanasi. Over 27 days, it will present vocal, instrumental, Harikatha, jugalbandhi, and devotional performances.

The celebrations, organised by Sree Ramaseva Mandali at the special pandal, Old Fort High School Grounds in Chamarajpet, consistently attract generations of music lovers in the city.

"The nostalgia of knowing that your parents and grandparents too experienced the music of legendary maestros under the same roof only adds to the excitement and emotional connection felt by today's rasikas," says S N Varadaraj, the managing trustee at Sree Ramaseva Mandali, Chamarajpet. TNN

DYNAMIC DUO: Carnatic vocalists Ranjani (L) and Gayatri will perform at the festival; (R) Guddali puja for this year's pandal was performed by Dr C S Kedar, chief mentor of the festival, S N Varadaraj, managing trustee, and S V Abhijith, executive officer



Geeta with her husband Raj

MY FAVOURITE RECIPE

KOSAMBARI
FOOD FOR THE BODY & SOUL

Geeta Raj

In many homes, the arrival of Ugadi and Ramanavami is marked by simple dishes that carry deep meaning. One such beloved preparation is kosambari, a fresh, wholesome salad that celebrates seasonal ingredients and the joy of sharing food with family.

Traditionally made with soaked moong dal and lightly seasoned vegetables, kosambari is known for its simplicity. But in this festive version, the humble dish blossoms into something vibrant and colorful while still honoring its roots.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup moong dal, soaked for 1–2 hours and drained
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- ½ cucumber, finely chopped
- ½ cup boiled beetroot, diced
- ½ kiwi, peeled and chopped
- ½ cup paneer, cut into small cubes
- 2 tbsp pomegranate seeds
- 2 tbsp roasted peanuts
- 1 tsp flax seeds
- 1 tsp pumpkin seeds
- 1 tsp chia seeds
- 2 tbsp finely chopped coriander leaves
- 1 tbsp finely chopped mint leaves
- Juice of ½ lime
- Salt to taste
- For the tempering (tadka)
- 1 tsp oil
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- A few curry leaves
- 1 small green chili, finely chopped

METHOD

➤ Place the soaked and drained moong dal in a large bowl. Add grated carrots, chopped cucumber, diced boiled beetroot and paneer cubes. Mix gently.

➤ Add chopped kiwi and pomegranate seeds. Sprinkle roasted peanuts, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds and chia seeds.

➤ Stir in chopped coriander leaves and mint leaves. Season with salt and squeeze fresh lime juice over the mixture. Toss lightly to combine.

➤ Heat oil in a small pan for the tempering. Add mustard seeds and let them splutter. Add curry leaves and chopped green chili and sauté briefly.

➤ Pour this aromatic tempering over the kosambari, mix gently and serve fresh. This colourful, nutrient-packed kosambari makes a refreshing festive dish.

Geeta is a homemaker. She lives at The Promont in Banashankari.

LEARN SPOKEN KANNADA

We continue the Kannada learning series, designed by Makaranda. Use the QR code to get to an audio file that will help you with pronunciations.

Website : https://makaranda-er12.onrender.com

QR code for Lesson 6A audio file

Lesson 6 Part A

Today let us learn some new words.

WORDS TABLE

Kannada	English
gaaDi	vehicle
paravaanagi	license
daNDa	fine
kempu deepa	red signal
haLadi deepa	yellow signal
hasiru deepa	green signal
paadachaarigaLu	pedestrians
niyama	rule
surakSHate	safety
guddu	hit
praaNa	life

SINGULAR/PLURAL

Singular	Plural
gaaDi	gaaDigaLu
paadachaari	paadachaarigaLu
niyama	niyamagaLu
deepa	deepagaLu

Answer Keys for previous lesson (Lesson 5C)

Section 1: Match the following

1-b, 2-c, 3-d, 4-d, 5-a, 6-d, 7-a, 8-d, 9-c,10-b,11-d,12-b,13-c,14-a,15-a,16-a,17-b,18-b,19-a,20-b,21-a,22-c

The scenario features a conversation between a vehicle owner and traffic police

Speaker	Kannada Sentence	English Sentence
Traffic Police	gaaDi pakkakke haaki.	Park the vehicle to the side.
Traffic Police	paravaanagi koDi, gaaDi insurance , emmission check pramaaNapatra mattu RC card tOrisi.	Show your license, vehicle insurance, emission check certificate and RC card.
Vehicle Owner	tagoLLi sar, ellaa sari ideyaa sar? naanu hOgabahudaa?	Take them sir. Is everything ok sir? May I leave?
Traffic Police	hOgabahudu, aadare 1000 roopaayi daNDa koTTu hOgi.	You can go but pay a fine of Rs 1,000 before you leave.
Traffic Police	kempu deepa iddaaga, gaaDi ODisikoNDu bandri, sanchaari niyama ullanghane alvaa?	You drove when the signal was red; that is a traffic rule violation, isn't it?
Traffic Police	nODi illi, namma camera dalli daakhalaagide, illi sahi haaki.	Look here, it has been recorded on our camera. Sign here.
Vehicle Owner	ayyO kSHamisi sar, 1000 roopaayi nanna hatra illa sar, nanage kelasa kooDa illa, baDava sar.	Oh! Please forgive me sir. I don't have Rs 1,000 with me. I don't even have a job, I am a poor man sir.

Exercises: Section 1

Match the following and write the serial number of your answers in column K.

Kannada Word (K)	English Equivalent(E)	K
1. pramaaNapatra	a. job	
2. sahi	b. reduce	
3. kshamisi	c. forgive / excuse	
4. kelasa	d. certificate	
5. kaDIme	e. market	
6. maarukaTTe	f. start	
7. shuru	g. sign	
8. hOgabahudu	h. You can go	
9. tappu	i. mistake	

Exercises: Section 2

Translate the following sentences into Kannada. Read out the sentences, record your voice and upload the recordings by scanning the QR code below by March 22, 2026 (Sunday), 11: 59 pm. Top three submissions will be recognized next week.

1. Park the vehicle to the side.
2. Show your license and RC card.
3. Stop the vehicle when the signal turns red.
4. Why should pedestrians walk on the zebra crossing?
5. Traffic rules are important for our safety.

Note 1 : Google and AI generated answers will not be considered

Note 2 : Answer Keys for this lesson will be published next week.

Winners of the contest Lesson 4B

Surya P Chaluvadi | Dhanalakshmi sankar | Suresh Chandra

MLAs pitch ₹5cr per ward at GBA's pre-budget meeting

Push For Local Control of Cash To Fix Infra

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Photo for representation

CIVIC FUNDING REFORM

- MLAs across parties have demanded ₹5 crore per ward to address pressing civic issues
- Focus on decentralised funding to fix roads, improve footpaths, and strengthen basic facilities
- Combined budget outlay likely around ₹20,000 crore, with greater emphasis on faster, ward-level project execution

Bengaluru: A strong pitch for decentralised development funding dominated the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) pre-budget meeting Friday, with city MLAs cutting across party lines demanding a grant of Rs 5 crore per ward to address pressing civic issues. During a pre-budget meeting chaired by deputy chief minister and Bengaluru in-charge minister DK Shivakumar, legislators collectively pushed for focused investments in local infrastructure. According to GBA officials, MLAs were invited to present constituency-level requirements.

Among the proposals, the demand for fixed ward-wise allocation stood out, reflecting concerns over deteriorating roads, encroached footpaths, and inadequate civic amenities. Jayanagar MLA CK Ramamurthy said all MLAs have jointly sought Rs 5 crore per ward, over and above the existing state and corporation funds. "These dedicated funds are essential for internal development. We want to prioritise clean and accessible footpaths, motorable ward roads, and improved civic infrastructure," he explained, stressing the need for targeted grassroots spending.

Responding to the MLAs' demand later, Shivakumar said, "MLAs have also submitted their requests and have urged that grants be provided by ward. Let us see how much can be allocated."

₹20k-crore budget?

The demand comes at a time when Bengaluru's civic administration is undergoing major restructuring. Following the division of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike into five separate city corporations under GBA, each entity is set to present its own budget for 2026-27.

Sources in GBA indicated that the combined outlay for all five corporations is expected to be around Rs 20,000 crore. Each corporation is likely to have a budget ranging between Rs 3,000 crore and Rs 5,000 crore, marking a significant scale of spending in the first financial year after the restructuring. For FY 2025-26, the erstwhile BBMP had an outlay of over Rs 19,000 crore. After the GBA came into existence in Aug 2025, funds and revenues were distributed among the five corporations, which will now present their budgets.

Maheshwar Rao, chief commissioner of GBA, told **TOI** that unlike the previous year, each corporation will now have its own full-fledged budget. "In 2025-26, the overall budget was shared with all the corporations by allocating funds for various works between Sept 2025 and March 2026," he said.

Officials added that while the exact date of budget presentation has not been formally announced, it is likely to be tabled within the coming week, before March-end. "This timeline is being considered to ensure sufficient time for approvals before the start of the new financial year," an official said.

Big civic priorities

The pre-budget meeting also highlighted broader civic priorities, including improving road conditions, strengthening pedestrian infrastructure, and ensuring better utilisation of funds at the ward level. MLAs pointed out that in the absence of dedicated allocations, smaller but critical works often face delays due to bureaucratic and funding bottlenecks. The push for ward-level grants is being seen as an effort to empower local representatives to directly address constituency issues, particularly in rapidly expanding urban pockets.

Man steals UPS batteries used for traffic signals, CCTV; held

Bengaluru: Parappana Agrahara police arrested a habitual offender involved in stealing UPS batteries, used for traffic signals, CCTV cameras and streetlights. They have also recovered 51 batteries along with the autorickshaw used in the crimes.

The accused, **Chinnadorai**, 38, a resident of SRY Layout in Vaddarapalya and native of Villupuram in Tamil Nadu, is engaged in scrap business. Efforts are on to nab his absconding associate.

A private firm manager in Electronics City filed a complaint on Feb 25 after 10 UPS batteries used to power CCTV cameras, streetlights and traffic signals were stolen — six from Electronics City Phase 2 and four from Shanthipura Main Road. The theft was discovered following power disruptions around 3am. Police tracked down Chinnadorai and arrested him in Vaddarapalya on March 9.

During interrogation, he allegedly confessed he and an associate stole batteries from multiple locations across Bengaluru and stored them at his scrap shop. They transported the batteries using an autorickshaw and sold them for Rs 1,000–2,000 each. The recovered property is estimated at around Rs 4 lakh, cops said.

Police said Chinnadorai has been involved in such thefts since 2022 and was arrested earlier as well. TNN

Stay safe, avoid wires: Bescom

Bengaluru: With pre-monsoon showers lashing parts of the city over the past two days, Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (Bescom) issued an advisory urging citizens to follow electrical safety measures.

The power utility cautioned people against going near damaged poles, snapped wires or tree branches that have fallen on electric lines due to strong winds and rain. It also warned against standing under trees carrying power lines or moving close to transformers during rain. Bescom asked citizens to report such incidents to its helpline 1912 or to one of the following WhatsApp numbers: South Circle: 8277884011; West Circle: 8277884012; East Circle: 8277884013; North Circle: 8277884014. TNN

LAND REQUIREMENT BY A PREMIUM EDUCATION INSTITUTION

A reputed premium education group is seeking to acquire a scenic land parcel in Bengaluru for the development of a world-class educational institution.

Key Requirements:

- Land area: 20–30 acres
- Location: Bengaluru
- Excellent road connectivity, preferably on or near a highway
- Availability of water and electricity connections
- Clear title and suitable for an elite institutional development
- Travel distance from Bengaluru airport should not be more than 45 minutes.

Landowners/brokers with suitable properties are invited to respond with complete details on or before 7th April 2026.
Contact: land.india26@gmail.com

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Only half of city voters mapped before SIR, officials blame apathy

Sanjay.Murty@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Even after more than two months of sustained efforts, just over half of Bengaluru's voters have been mapped by the authorities ahead of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls in Karnataka. According to officials, only 54.3% of voters were covered during the pre-SIR exercise carried out by city corporations on behalf of the Election Commission.

Authorities have attributed the slow progress to several factors, including urban apathy, unavailability of residents during weekdays and significant changes in the city's residential landscape over the past 24 years.

The mapping exercise is being conducted by booth-level officers (BLOs), who visit households to verify the voter list from 2002 against the updated list for 2025. The SIR was last conducted in Karnataka in 2002. As part of the process, voters listed in 2002 are being verified, and their next generation is being recorded as progeny.

"The city has grown leaps and bounds since 2002. Many residents have moved in from other states and become voters here. However, we require information on where they voted in 2002, and we also map their parents as ancestors in the respective constituencies in those states," Amaresh H, additional commissioner (revenue), Bengaluru North city corporation, said.

BNCC has been leading in the pre-SIR mapping efforts, with commissioner Pommala Sunil Kumar as the assistant district electoral officer (ADEO), Bengaluru North. A total of seven assembly constituencies are covered by ADEO (North), with a total voter count of over 23 lakh.

A Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) official said the mapping in Bengaluru is being supervised by four additional district electoral officers for Bengaluru Urban, Central, North and South. "The exercise is not related to the upcoming city corporation elections. Corrections related to ward-wise distribution of voters will be taken up by the state election commission. Close to 9,000 personnel are working on the exercise in the city. Most of the BLOs are schoolteachers. Other staff from departments like KGID, treasury, and Bescom have also been deputed for the exercise," the official added.

Amaresh said the main challenge has been people's lack of willingness to provide information to the BLOs. "Though they are educated, many urban residents do not understand the importance of such exercises. We have had meetings with residents' associations to raise awareness," he added.

Many BLOs were asked to conduct special drives on weekends to cover voters who were unavailable during weekdays. As most BLOs are schoolteachers, they are required to conduct the mapping before or after school hours.

Book call with BLO

Mapping of voters will continue till the commencement of SIR, which is scheduled for April. Voters who have missed the mapping exercise can alert their BLO using the 'Book a call with BLO' facility on the voter services portal of the EC's website — **voters.eci.gov.in** — where they must enter their EPIC number

Fodder worth ₹2cr gutted in godown fire

TOI

BATTLING THE BLAZE

Bengaluru: A fire gutted two fodder godowns at a private goshala near Bidarahalli, east Bengaluru, on March 17, destroying dry grass worth over Rs 2.2 crore.

Pukhraj Maharaj, 41, who has been running Shri Krishna Goshala for seven years, said the shelter houses 1,158 cows rescued from slaughterhouses with the help of organisations and police.

The facility had stocked dry fodder for nearly a year, procured from farmers in Doddaballapur, Devanahalli, Sathanur, Bagalur and nearby areas. On March 17, Maharaj had stepped out with workers to procure additional fodder near Hunsur village. Minutes later, a worker alerted his daughter about the fire. Maharaj rushed back to find two fodder storage units engulfed in flames. The cows were shifted to a safe place as firefighters battled the blaze for hours. Maharaj alleged unidentified persons deliberately set fire to the stored fodder.

A police officer said forensic science officials collected samples of the burnt fodder. "If the remains contain traces of petrol or diesel, it will confirm sabotage." TNN

Fire destroys lk patient files at Nimhans' records dept

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Bengaluru: More than 1,000 patient files and registers were destroyed in a fire at the medical records department (MRD) within the OPD building of National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (Nimhans) on March 13. The blaze was contained, but the matter has not been reported to police yet.

The incident occurred around 6.30pm after the department had closed. "We got a call from Nimhans at 6.59pm, seeking help," said G Ravikumar, a firefighter who works with the state fire and emergency services department. "Our personnel reached the hospital by 7.06pm, extinguished the fire and got back by 10.25pm," he told **TOI**.

Dr Shashidhara HN, resident medical officer at Nimhans, said soon after smoke was noticed emanating from the MRD windows, action was taken and sprinklers activated, which helped contain the fire. "The flames did not spread; instead, they caused superficial damage to a few hundred patient record files and some registers, with no complete destruction or casualties reported," he said, adding the hospital has a digital hospital information system in place (introduced in July 2025) and hence most records are backed up.

EVENING BLAZE: The incident occurred on March 13, after the department had closed. No police complaint has been filed so far

Though the authorities claim the fire will not impact patient care, sources say otherwise. The damage is not just limited to the loss of handwritten prescriptions by senior doctors, as claimed by the authorities. "Seven racks were burnt to ashes, each of which had at least 60 files. The destroyed or damaged records may include medico-legal/court case files and records related to prison inmates referred for mental health evaluation, raising potential legal implications," said a source, on the condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, Dr Shashidhara said an inspection (including an external biosafety/fire safety person) identified two likely sources: overheating from an old tubelight choke or an exhaust fan. "We haven't filed an FIR yet as there is no loss of life, injury, major property loss, or suspicion of foul play... Future precautions will include replacing old tubelights with LED lighting (supported by a govt action plan/grant) and reorganising MRD storage/furniture to reduce dense packing so any future fire would be less likely to spread," he added.

Dr Arvinda HR, medical superintendent at Nimhans, said the suspected cause is an electrical short circuit, but this is only a preliminary assessment.

Local MLAs will decide on parks: DKS

▶ Continued from P1 (Other Book)

Referring to vendors leaving carts overnight on roads and footpaths, Shivakumar said, "GBA officials have been directed to seize such vehicles and transport them to dumping sites."

Amid pressure to keep neighbourhood parks open 24X7, Shivakumar said, "Not all MLAs are in favour of it. A few want them to stay open throughout the day and a few others want them to open only in the morning and the evening. We have left it to the discretion of the local MLAs and they will decide on park timings," the deputy CM said.

BUDGET BOOST FOR 'HER'

Strengthening Women Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh

WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- A provision of approximately ₹18,620 crore has been proposed for Women and Child Development schemes, which is 11% higher compared to the year 2025-2026
- A provision of ₹3,500 crore proposed for the Destitute Women Pension Scheme. Under this scheme, the number of beneficiaries was 17 lakh 32 thousand in 2016-2017, which has increased to 38 lakh 58 thousand 922 so far in 2025-2026.
- A provision of ₹400 crore outlined under the 'Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana'
- A provision of ₹100 crore has been tabled for the construction of hostels for working women and ₹35 crore is being proposed under the 'Mukhyamantri Shramjeevi Mahila Hostel Construction Scheme'
- A provision of ₹252 crore outlined for the 'Uttar Pradesh Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana'
- Under the 'Mukhyamantri Bal Ashray Yojana', a provision of ₹80 crore has been suggested for the construction of buildings
- In the state, approximately 1.66 crore beneficiaries are benefitting through supplementary nutrition programmes
- Under the 'Hot Cooked Meal Scheme', fresh hot cooked meals are being provided at Anganwadi centres to 35.46 lakh children aged between 3 to 6 years

PICS: DIPR, UP GOVT

Women at the centre of UP's development push

The Uttar Pradesh budget 2026-27 places a renewed focus on women's welfare, reinforcing the state government's commitment to empowerment and safety through initiatives aligned with Mission Shakti. The budget outlines targeted provisions aimed at enhancing education, health, financial inclusion and skill development opportunities for women across urban and rural areas.

Special emphasis has been given to strengthening support systems for women through improved access to self-employment schemes, entrepreneurship programmes and vocational training. These measures are designed to encourage economic independence and create sustainable livelihood opportunities.

In addition, the state government continues to prioritise women's safety through strengthened law and order mechanisms, awareness programmes and support services. Investments in education and healthcare initiatives are also steadily increasing, benefiting girls and women significantly.

Together, these efforts aim to build a more inclusive and supportive environment where women can pursue opportunities with confidence, contributing actively to UP's social and economic progress.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

- Crimes against women have decreased in comparison to 2016, with a decrease in murder by 48%, 19% in dowry deaths, 67% in rape, and 34% in cases of molestation
- Under 'Mission Shakti', a provision of ₹25 crore has been proposed for the purchase of vehicles to facilitate the field movement of women beat personnel
- 'Janani Shishu Suraksha Programme' has been implemented in all districts of the state
- In development blocks where Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas have not been established, a new scheme has been outlined for the establishment of Awasiya Balika Vidyalaya, with a provision of ₹580 crore
- A budget provision of ₹400 crore has been proposed for the Rani Lakshmi Bai Scooty Yojana to provide scooters to meritorious girl students
- Under the 'Mukhyamantri Samuhik Vivah Yojana', the grant amount for the marriage of girls of all classes has been increased from ₹51,000 to ₹1.01 lakh. A provision of ₹750 crore has been suggested for the scheme
- A provision of ₹100 crore proposed for the 'Shadi Anudan Yojana' for daughters from economically weaker families belonging to the Scheduled Castes
- There is also a provision of ₹50 crore tabled for the daughters of economically weaker families belonging to the General Category
- A provision of ₹210 crore has been proposed for the 'Shadi Anudan Yojana' for daughters of economically weaker persons belonging to OBC

SHE RISES

Key Initiatives for Financial & Social Progress

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE & RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

₹39,000 crore in Banking Transactions

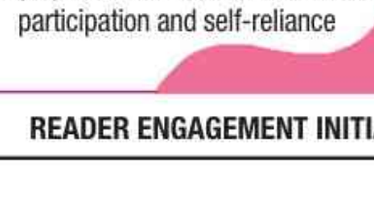
Nearly 40,000 BC Sakhis processed massive transaction volumes across 58,000 gram panchayats, generating ₹107 crore profit

BC Sakhis	₹107 crore profit	Digital financial literacy 58,000 panchayats
Sugarcane Slips	60,000 Farmers	Priority access for female agriculturalists

SAFETY, HEALTH & SOCIAL WELFARE

'Safe City' Infrastructure & Policing

Deployment of women police beats, CCTV networks, and dedicated working women hostels



Sumangala Yojana	26.81 lakh children	Direct support for girl children's welfare

Expanding Women-Led Milk Producing Companies

Companies established in Gorakhpur, Bareilly & Rae Bareli, with upcoming expansions in Prayagraj & Lucknow

60,000 Women Sugarcane Farmers Prioritised

Female farmers are now receiving priority status for the issuance of sugarcane slips

26.81 lakh girls supported

Beneficiaries reached through the Mukhyamantri Sumangala Yojana as of January 2026

Mission Shakti Integrated Services

Consolidating security, health and employment services to drive social participation and self-reliance

AI GENERATED INFOGRAPHIC

READER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Co fined for cutting care for 70-yr-old's disabled son

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Bengaluru: A 70-year-old widow, Vinoda HS, has got relief after a consumer disputes redressal commission pulled up a city-based caregiver agency for abruptly stopping services for her bedridden son despite receiving the monthly fee in advance.

The Bengaluru Urban II additional district consumer disputes redressal commission ordered Sagar Health Seva Foundation (SHSF) to refund the monthly fee paid in advance and pay compensation as well as litigation costs to the complainant, who lives in Banashankari III Stage, south Bengaluru.

The complainant's only son, Vikram, is bedridden due to secondary progressive multiple sclerosis, with spastic quadriparesis. He requires round-the-clock support for even basic day-to-day activities such as eating, bathing, and personal care.

According to her complaint, SHSF assured her it would provide trained caregivers who would stay at her residence and, to ensure uninterrupted service, substitutes would be arranged immediately in case anyone was absent. Vinoda signed a service agreement with the agency on April 18, 2024, and paid Rs 23,000 a month in advance through UPI transactions from April 2024 until Jan 2025.

The agency initially provided the services, but the situation changed after she made the payment for Jan. The agency abruptly stopped sending the caregiver within two days of her Jan 11, 2025, payment, leaving her son without the required assistance.

Vinoda signed a service agreement with the agency on April 18, 2024, and paid Rs 23,000 a month in advance. The agency initially provided the services for her bedridden son, but abruptly stopped sending the caregiver within two days of her Jan 11, 2025, payment. Her son has secondary progressive multiple sclerosis with spastic quadriparesis, requiring round-the-clock support for even basic day-to-day activities such as eating, bathing and personal care

Despite repeated attempts to contact the agency, she allegedly received no response. Because of her son's condition, Vinoda hired another person privately and lodged a police complaint on March 26, 2025. She filed a consumer complaint on May 23, 2025, alleging deficiency in service.

In its defence, SHSF claimed in written arguments that Vinoda had violated the contract terms by independently contacting the caregiver. It stated that the caregiver had a family emergency. However, the commission noted that it did not provide any documentary evidence to support these claims.

The commission bench, comprising president Vijaykumar M Pawale and member V Anuradha, on March 9 ordered SHSF to refund Rs 23,000 with 6% interest per annum from Jan 11, 2025, until realisation, along with Rs 10,000 towards mental agony and litigation costs.

LPG crunch: No 'naati koli', skin-on chicken for festival

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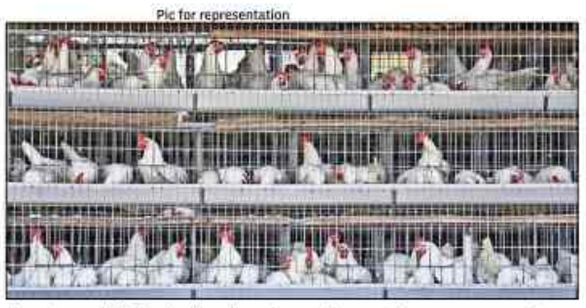
Bengaluru: The shortage of commercial LPG, triggered by the ongoing crisis in West Asia, has begun to take a deeper toll on Bengaluru's food ecosystem, with chicken shops reporting sharp losses and limited offerings.


Pic for representation

Vendors said LPG shortage has forced them not to prepare country chicken as they require sustained flame for cleaning and roasting

BURNER WOES

While the supply crunch has affected eateries for nearly two weeks, its impact was felt more acutely Friday — a traditionally high-demand day for non-vegetarian food during Ugadi (Hosatodaku) — leaving many customers disappointed.

Chicken vendors across the city said short supply of LPG has forced them not to prepare certain varieties, particularly 'naati koli' (country chicken) and skin-on chicken, both of which require sustained flame for proper cleaning and roasting. In the absence of adequate LPG supply, many shops have temporarily stopped selling these items, restricting their menus to skinless chicken.

"For the past 15 days, we have stopped selling country chicken, and even skin chicken is unavailable," said Prathap, a chicken shop owner in Chandapura. "We are struggling to get LPG cylinders at any cost. Today (Friday), which should have been a big business day, turned out to be very bad for us."

Vendors explained that country chicken requires intense flame to singe off feathers and clean the meat, while skin-on chicken must be thoroughly roasted to remove impurities and ensure hygiene — making LPG essential for daily operations.

Attaulla Sharaff, who runs a shop near Lalbagh Main Gate, said the situation has worsened as existing gas stocks have run out. "We have not received commercial LPG for almost 15 days. People mostly prefer skin chicken. We have lost nearly 40% of our customers," he said.

A vendor from Kabalamma Chicken Centre in JP Nagar said the shortage is steadily hurting business: "I am not selling country chicken because I don't have LPG supply." The shortage has also disrupted consumer plans. Muniraju Reddy, a resident of BTM Layout, said he had to visit multiple shops before opting for an alternative. "My father wanted 'naati koli saaru' Friday, but many shops were not selling country chicken, citing LPG shortage. Even skin chicken wasn't available. With no options left, I had to order regular skinless chicken online," he said.

C'ghatta rly bridge ready, major arterial road nears completion

11km Of 10-Lane Corridor May Be Ready In April

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Bengaluru: The long-awaited connectivity boost for west Bengaluru is finally nearing reality. BDA has completed the railway underbridge (RUB) at Challaghatta, a crucial component of infrastructure under the Major Arterial Road (MAR) project.

MAGADI RD - NH-275

Once fully operational, the corridor will create a seamless link between Magadi Road and Bengaluru–Mysuru access-controlled highway through Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout (NPKL). Officials say the long-delayed project has now entered its final stretch, with full completion expected by April.

According to BDA officials, construction of the RUB involved several technical challenges as the work had to be carried out beneath a live railway track connecting Bengaluru and Mysuru.

Syed Asif

FASTER CONNECT: The corridor will create a seamless link between Magadi Road and Bengaluru–Mysuru access-controlled highway through Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout

Cycle track, canopy on 11-km stretch

Considering public demand, BDA will also construct a cycle track and undertake beautification with flower- and fruit-bearing trees. The 11-km road is planned as a 100-metre-wide, 10-lane corridor with six main carriageway lanes and four service lanes to manage local traffic. Multiple rotaries are also planned to provide access to various blocks of Kempegowda Layout.

The 40-metre box-pushing operation was particularly complex, with each of the eight concrete boxes weighing about 1,200 metric tonnes. "Works beneath an active railway line usually take around six months. However, with close coordination with the railways, deployment of additional manpower and round-the-clock work, the project was completed in three months," a BDA official said.

BDA is also constructing a vehicular overpass near the RUB. The proposed overpass, located about 10 metres from the underpass, will provide connectivity between Blocks 5 and 6 of Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout. Officials said the overpass work is progressing well and is expected to be completed in a month.

The MAR is being developed as part of the proposed Peripheral Ring Road Phase-2 project that will link Hosur Road with Bengaluru–Mysuru highway. Officials said the govt has approved acquisition of four acres of land along the MAR alignment for the project.

"There are 17 points where service roads currently have missing links. Process is on to complete the works that include with ducts and provisions for utilities," the official said.

Motorists and allottees of NPKL demanded that Challaghatta junction, where the MAR meets Bengaluru–Mysuru highway, be designed in a futuristic manner to avoid traffic congestion. BDA currently plans to install traffic signals at the junction and take up integration works as part of PRR-2 project. Officials said traffic police have been consulted to ensure smooth movement.

Alipur villagers decide not to wear new clothes for Eid

Ranganath K | TNN

In a rare and poignant gesture, residents of Alipur village in Gauribidanur taluk, Kolar, have decided to mark Ramzan this year without wearing new clothes, as a tribute to a slain Shia leader from Iran.

Alipur, located about 90km from Bengaluru, is home to over 25,000 Shia Muslims and around 600 Hindus. The village is known for its long-standing communal harmony, with no reported clashes between communities for over five decades.

Despite Ramzan being one of the most significant and celebratory periods in the Islamic calendar, the prevailing mood in the village is of the mourning. "Ramzan will be observed, but in a symbolic and subdued manner this year," said Abbas, a local merchant. "We will offer prayers and perform rituals, but we will refrain from wearing new clothes as a mark of respect."

He added many in the community will wear a black cloth on their shoulders and forearms to signify grief. At the same time, the spirit of harmony will continue, with Muslims exchanging fruits and sweets with their Hindu neighbours. The decision follows protests held on March 1 in the village, condemning the killing, during which shops were shut and special prayers offered for peace.

Medical student mows down farmer, 43, near Devanahalli

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: A 43-year-old farmer was killed after a speeding car rammed his bike near Bettakote village in Devanahalli taluk early Friday.

The accident occurred on Budigere–Devanahalli Main Road when a Maruti Swift Dzire, driven by a medical student, hit Venkategowda BV's motorcycle from behind at high speed. The impact was such that **Venkategowda** was flung into the air before falling on the road. The car also toppled before veering into a roadside ditch. Both vehicles were extensively damaged, police said.

Venkategowda was on his way to his agricultural land when the accident occurred. He is survived by his mother, wife and two teenage children.

TOI

MANGLED: The impact of the collision on Budigere–Devanahalli Main Road was such that Venkategowda was flung into the air before falling on the road. The car also toppled before veering into a roadside ditch

The car driver has been identified as Anand S, a resident of Hennur and an MBBS student. Villagers found his ID card in the car. A senior police officer said Anand is yet to return home out of fear. "We have contacted his family and the institute, where he is studying, to convince him to surrender," the officer added.

Three trains to arrive early

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: South Western Railway (SWR) has decided to speed up the following trains by advancing their arrival timings at respective stations: 17378 Mangaluru Central–Vijayapura Daily Express will arrive at Vijayapura at 10:30am instead of 10:50am; 16545 Yeshwantpur–Sindhanur Daily Express will reach Sindhanur at 10:55am instead of 11:10am; 16214 SSS Hubballi–Arsikere Daily Express will arrive at Arsikere at 9:55pm instead of 10:10pm.

There will be no change in timings at other stations for these trains.

Met & married in one day; bride disappears with gold in fortnight

Ranganath K | TNN

Bengaluru: In a bizarre turn of events, a 24-year-old woman who was married as part of a single-day arrangement has allegedly gone missing from her husband's house. The incident occurred at Gownicheruvupalli village in Batlahalli police limits of Chintamani taluk, around 100km from Bengaluru.

A complaint about his missing wife and gold has been lodged by Bhaskar, a native of Madanapalli in Andhra Pradesh and an employee at a firm in Bengaluru.

The drama started when Bhaskar was approached by three marriage brokers with a proposal for Nethra from Kotlapalli near Marganapalli. On Feb 27, both Bhaskar and Nethra met for the first time at one of the brokers' homes. Within hours, the duo agreed to marry, and the wedding was solemnised the very same day.

Bhaskar allegedly paid Rs 75,000 to one of the brokers, policesaid.

Following the wedding, the couple stayed at Bhaskar's uncle's house for about 15 days. On March 15, Bhaskar left for his hometown, leaving Nethra behind. In the evening, Bhaskar received a call from his uncle informing him that Nethra had vanished. In his statement, Bhaskar claimed he had been pressured into a quick marriage by the brokers. What surfaced later, however, deepened the mystery with Bhaskar alleging that Nethra was already married, had two children, and had even undergone a tubectomy.

Sub-inspector Shivakumar said there is no mention of missing jewellery in the written complaint, though Bhaskar has claimed verbally that she took some ornaments with her.

Hippo charged at vet, causing severe damage to liver, lungs

▶ Continued from page 1 (Other Book)

The animal charged at the doctor and caused critical damage to her liver and lungs. She was rushed to a private hospital where she succumbed to injuries around 6.30am Friday.

Dr Muruli Manohar, a former zoo veterinarian, said while he was assisting the young vet, he had not instructed her to approach the hippo at such a late hour.

She studied at Veterinary College, Hebbal, and graduated in 2023. She worked as assistant to the Mangaluru Circle wildlife doctor before joining Shivamogga zoo in Feb.

Minister Khandre said officials have been instructed to submit their probe report in seven days. Following a complaint from the victim's father, Dhruva Kumar, a pharmacist, Shivamogga police registered a case of unnatural death.

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Reel stunt: Teen dies in scooter-car collision

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

A 15-year-old boy, son of BJP functionary and developer Veeresh Sangalad, died on the spot in Hubballi Thursday after his electric scooter was hit by an Audi car driven by his friend during the filming of a reel.

The deceased is **Nimish Sangalad**, a class 9 student of a private school in Mysuru and a resident of Laxmi Nagar, Hubballi. He had returned home after his class 9 exams for Ugadi festival. Family sources said the teenagers planned to shoot a reel of speeding vehicles at the Shejawadkar plot.

"They aimed at shooting a sudden brake. However, Nimish's friend, who is also a teenager, failed to apply the brakes and lost control of the car. Namish died on the spot," police commissioner N Shashikumar said.

Sailors from coast stuck at sea due to West Asia war

Mangaluru: A marine engineer from the city and a cadet from Udupi are among several Indian seafarers caught in a tense maritime standoff in the Persian Gulf, as escalating regional hostilities have brought movement through the vital Strait of Hormuz to a near-standstill.

Speaking from an LPG carrier anchored in uncertainty, the marine engineer said the crew has been stranded since the last week of Feb, with no clarity on when they will be allowed to transit. Back home, families are growing increasingly anxious.

"We are part of the merchant navy, entrusted with ensuring India's energy security. Our vessel carries LPG cargo critical to the country. Under normal conditions, crossing the Strait of Hormuz takes just over two hours. Now, we have been waiting here for weeks," he said.

He said the crew witnesses frequent barrages of missiles and drones. "Every day, there is something happening in the skies. It is not just the delay, it is the uncertainty that weighs on us," he said. TNN

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TIMES NATION

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026

CENTRE WILL 'TAKE AWAY' PEOPLE'S CITIZENSHIP IN NAME OF NRC, CENSUS AFTER BENGAL POLLS, SAYS CM MAMATA

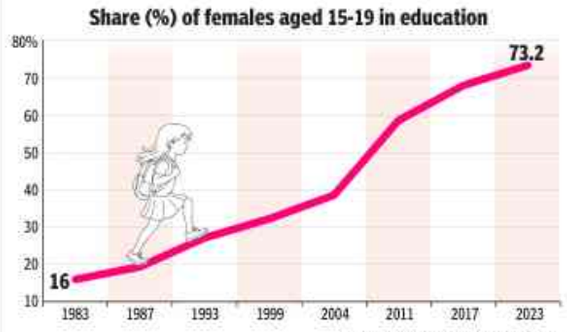
ADMITTED FOR ROUTINE CHECKUP, NOT ANGIOPLASTY, SAYS GOA CM SAWANT, REFUTING HOSP'S STATEMENT

STATOISTICS A slice of life in numbers

Enrolment of girls in schools zoomed 5x in 40 years

The share of Indian girls aged 15-19 in education has surged from 16% in 1983 to over 73% in 2023, reflecting significant gains in access, retention and social attitudes towards girls' schooling

Share (%) of females aged 15-19 in education



Source: State of Working India Report, 2026

Every person with a phone today is media, a threat to free trial: SC

Seek A Comprehensive Mechanism For Police, Conventional & Social Media, Top Court Tells Petitioner

Dhananjay.Mahapatra
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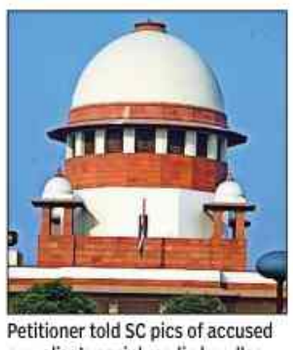
New Delhi: Supreme Court Friday expressed serious concerns over the infectious trend of each person with a mobile phone becoming media and instantaneously uploading videos on social media platforms and said such activities posed a grave threat to fair trial of accused.

A bench of CJI Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said this while hearing a PIL which alleged that police upload videos and photographs of arrested accused on their social media handles, creating a bias in people's mind, who later blame the judiciary if they get acquitted for lack of evidence.

The bench agreed with senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan that "every person with a mobile phone has become media" and observed that whenever there is an accident, people take out their mobile phones to create content even when a person is bleeding on the road.

Justice Bagchi told the petitioner that instead of talking of social media handles of police, which in all states have been given three months by the SC to formulate and comply with a standard operating procedure (SOP) regarding police-media briefings to balance transparency in investigation, right to information and right to fair trial of accused, it should seek a comprehensive mechanism for police, conventional and social media. He said, "On a larger canvas, we believe police should not create a bias against the accused through its briefings. Police can be restrained through the SOP. But what about the media, especially social media, and the public? Can they be restrained? Comparatively, TV channels are much more restrained, even though one might disagree with their views."



Petitioner told SC pics of accused on police's social media handles create bias in mind of people, who blame judiciary in case of acquittal

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta said there are tabloids on social media which in an understatement could be characterised as "blackmailers". Justice Bagchi said, "The problem is the atomised social media." CJI Kant said, "It is akin to or a different facet of digital arrest. There is a tendency in towns and cities away from the national capital where people flaunt their credentials as media persons and boldly display it on their vehicles for ulterior designs."

Sankaranarayanan said, "I know a few advocates who sport 'Supreme Court Advocate' stickers on their cars to evade paying tolls on highways." The bench said since the issue of fair trial for accused required a comprehensive approach, it would be better if the petition is withdrawn and refiled with an enlarged scope after April when the SOP for police would have been implemented.

CJI recuses self from hearing PILs on panel to select CEC & ECs

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New Delhi: CJI Surya Kant on Friday recused from hearing a bunch of PILs challenging a 2023 law that altered the Supreme Court-framed composition of the panel for selection of chief election commissioner (CEC) and ECs by excluding the CJI from it.

CJI Kant cited "conflict of interest" to recuse from hearing the petitions which challenge the validity of the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. He said he would post the petitions before a bench that does not include any future CJIs.

Interestingly, the bench led by CJI Kant had Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, both of whom will go on to become CJIs in future. The CJI's stand that no future CJI would be part of the bench to hear the petitions would mean exclusion of the following judges — Justices Vikram Nath, B V Nagarathna, P S Narasimha, J B Pardiwala and K V Vishwanathan.

On Feb 3 last year, the Supreme Court had rejected pleas for stay on selection of CEC Rajiv Kumar, who was succeeded by Gyanesh Kumar on Feb 19, 2025.

A five-judge SC bench on Mar 2, 2023, in Anoop Baranwal case, had noticed a legislative vacuum on the process for selection of CEC and ECs and directed that a panel comprising the prime minister, the leader of the opposition and the CJI would advise the President on appointments to the Election Commission of India.

The new law, which came into force from Dec 29, 2023, replaced the CJI with a Union cabinet minister chosen by the PM.

SC on Mar 2, 2023 had directed that a panel comprising the PM, the leader of the opposition, and the CJI would advise the President on appointments to the poll panel. The new law, which came into force from Dec 29, 2023, replaced the CJI with a Union cabinet minister chosen by the PM

Till enactment of the 2023 law, it was the Union govt's sole prerogative to appoint any person as CEC and ECs in the commission as per Article 324(2) of the Constitution. The process of appointment of CEC and ECs was made subject to "provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament". From 1950 till 2023, there was a legislative vacuum in the process for appointment of CEC and ECs.

Petitioners argue that the executive has a firm grip over the entire selection process which creates doubt in the people's mind about the fairness of the Election Commission, which in turn puts a question mark on the fairness of elections.

KVK Sundaram remains the longest serving CEC, from Dec 20, 1958 till Sept 30, 1967, closely followed by first CEC Sukumar Sen from March 21, 1950 till Dec 19, 1958. From 1950 to 2004, in a span of 54 years, there were only 12 CECs, but in the next 22 years, there have been 13 CECs. It was a single member body comprising the CEC till Oct 1989, since then it has become a three-member body.

HC: 'Near relative' can include MIL in kidney-swap cases

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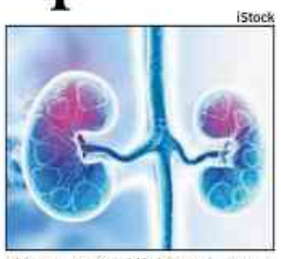
Chandigarh: Expanding the interpretation of "near relative" under Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, Punjab and Haryana HC has allowed a mother-in-law to be considered eligible in a kidney swap case.

"The list of relatives has shrunk. There are very few fortunate people who have grandparents and, in any case, grandparents cannot be expected to donate their organs during their lifetime on account of ailments," Justice Jagmohan Bansal said while hearing a petition filed by Anil Kumar and others.

HC said the expression "near relative" had been defined in the Act as "spouse, son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, grandson or granddaughter". "It is evident the legislature has used the expression 'means'. The expression 'includes' has not been used. As 'means' has been used, the list of relatives underscored in the said definition cannot be treated as exhaustive," Justice Bansal said. HC further noted if the statute was interpreted in the manner suggested by Centre, an orphan would not be able to receive an organ.



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The court noted if the statute was interpreted in the manner Centre suggested, an orphan wouldn't be able to receive an organ

Petitioners Kumar Harjit Singh, unrelated, were suffering from kidney ailments and needed transplant. Kidney swap was their only option. Kumar's mother-in-law and Singh's wife agreed to donate.

But the authorisation committee refused on grounds that a mother-in-law did not fall within the definition of "near relative".

SC OKs Mum coastal rd 'affecting 45k mangroves'

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New Delhi: Supreme Court Friday greenlighted Rs 18,263 cr Versova-Bhayandar Coastal Road Project but directed Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to scrupulously comply with Bombay HC directions to file yearly audit report on status of afforestation, which should be carried out prior or simultaneously, for a period of 10 years.

Refusing to entertain an appeal against HC's Dec 12 order granting permission for execution of the project, a bench of CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said there is no doubt about the public benefit of the project, which would decongest Western Express Highway. "Construction of this road is important for residents of Mumbai. We can't stall every developmental project even though it is equally important that the environment and conservation mechanisms are not compromised," the bench said.

SC directs Mumbai's civic body to adhere to HC's order to file yearly audit report on afforestation status

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta assured SC that yearly audit reports will be filed to ensure growth and health of the compensatory afforestation being carried out near Tadoba reserve forest and relocation and plantation of mangrove at 10km from the project site. SC said the annual report shall give complete details of the non-forest land used for afforestation. "In view of the safeguards incorporated in the order of HC, we do not see any reason to entertain the appeal," it said.

Appearing for NGO Vanashakti, senior advocate C U Singh said, "The impugned judgment permits the diversion of 103.6554 hectares of forest land constituting 45,675 mangroves located across Malad creek without any assessment of environmental and ecological harm that would be caused." SC said, "No mangrove should be removed unless there is overriding public interest. There is no dispute that the coastal road project connecting Versova and Bhayandar is of extreme public importance."

Narrating the beneficial effects of mangroves, which according to the NGO are much more effective in countering pollution and high tides, Singh said HC's nod would allow the proponents to cut down mangrove even before the stage-II environment impact assessment and forest clearance. Mehta said compensatory afforestation has already been carried out on 31 hectares of land. He said HC has put BMC to strict terms to ensure adequate compensatory afforestation, their growth and survival for at least 10 years.

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People have right to criticise judgments of courts, says CJI

▶ Continued from page 1

He produced an NCERT textbook that had the following paragraph: "However, there are also court judgments that people believe work against the best interests of common person. For example, activists who work on issues concerning the right to shelter and housing for the poor believe that recent judgments on evictions are a far cry from earlier judgments. While recent judgments tend to view slum dweller as an encroacher in city, earlier judgments had tried to protect the livelihoods of the slum dwellers."

Reading aloud the paragraph, the CJI-led bench said there is nothing objectionable about this. "This is a viewpoint on the judgment. People have a right to criticise the judgments of the courts. Criticism of judgment does not stand on the same footing as the earlier case (textbook reference to corruption in judiciary)" the CJI said. The bench disposed of the petition.

There shouldn't be hate speeches against any community: SC

Refuses To Admit Plea Alleging 'Brahmophobia'

TNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi: Supreme Court Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking its direction against hate speeches targeting the Brahmin community which the petitioner had alleged was "Brahmophobia".

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said, "We don't want hate speech against any community. It depends on education, intellectual development, tolerance and patience. Once everyone follows the fraternity, automatically there will be no hate speech."

Thereafter, petitioner Mahalingam Balaji decided to withdraw the plea, which the court allowed.

Justice Nagarathna also questioned why a particular community should seek protection against hate speech against themselves only and not for others. No one should indulge in hate speech and the petitioner can take up the specific instances before the appropriate forums, but not the judiciary, the judge said.

When Balaji said the judiciary was also being targeted on social media, SC said it was not concerned about false attacks on the judiciary.

In his plea, Balaji sought directions to central govt and state govts to recognise hate speech targeting the Brahmin community as a punishable form of caste-based discrimination, and to take prompt legal action against such instances. He also sought a detailed probe into alleged "coordinated domestic or foreign campaigns" aimed at inciting caste conflict by promoting targeted hatred against Brahmins.

He also sought directions to disqualify any public servant or constitutional office holder found indulging in caste-based hate speech against Brahmins.

SC: Officials of 3 states to be held liable for Chambal sanctuary damage

New Delhi: Taking suo motu cognisance of destruction of wildlife habitats in National Chambal Sanctuary, Supreme Court Friday issued notice to govts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It observed that their officials, i.e. forest, mining and water resources as well as police authorities, should be made liable for the damage as they failed to prevent illegal sand mining in the area.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta expressed concern over the damage being done to the sanctuary and said all aspects had to be examined after receiving response from various state govts and departments.

It said every act of destruction of wildlife habitat in a protected area would attract penalties under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, the Environment Protection Act, the Forest Conservation Act, the Biological Diversity Act, and the Indian Forest Act as well as other applicable statutes and rules. TNN

Bodybuilding eligible for 5% sports quota: Bby HC

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@timesofindia.com

Nagpur: In a landmark judgment redefining the contours of sports policy, Nagpur bench of Bombay high court held last week that "bodybuilding is a species of gymnastics" and therefore eligible for 5% reservation under Maharashtra's sports quota in govt jobs.

HC directed state to amend its July 1, 2016, govt resolution (GR) within four weeks to include bodybuilding in the list of eligible disciplines. It also quashed communications issued in 2019 and 2023 by deputy director of sports and youth services that denied recognition to bodybuilding.

Allowing a petition by Deepak Pawar, a bodybuilding athlete from Buldhana who argued his case in person, HC found the state's decision to exclude bodybuilding while including other non-Olympic sports lacked rational basis. "The inclusion or limiting quota to those games which are recognised or played in the Olympics, Asian or Commonwealth Games is contrary to the objective of the policy," HC observed. Exclusion of bodybuilding was "arbitrary" and violated Article 14 of the Constitution, it said.

MAHA TO AMEND POLICY

It noted that bodybuilding has been acknowledged through honours like Arjuna Award. HC also directed authorities to complete all consequential procedures relating to the petitioner within four weeks after incorporating bodybuilding into the policy.

You aren't marrying maid, share chores: SC to hubby

TNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi: Emphasising that household chores should be shared between a married couple, Supreme Court Friday observed that times have changed and a husband must share the burden of work. "You're not marrying a maid, you're marrying a life partner," said a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta to a man seeking divorce on grounds of "cruelty".

"You have to contribute in cooking, washing, etc. Today's times are different," the bench said and asked man and his wife to appear in person.

SC's observations came while hearing a petition filed by the man challenging a Karnataka High Court order. The HC had set aside a trial court order granting divorce to the man on the ground of cruelty.

During the hearing before SC, the man's counsel said mediation between the man and the woman — who got married in 2017 and have an eight-year old boy — had failed, and since 2019, the couple is separated.

DIVORCE CASE

"He wants divorce. Trial court granted divorce on ground of cruelty," the counsel said. SC asked what cruelty was alleged in the matter. The counsel said the woman had indulged in "improper behaviour and wasn't cooking". To this, Justice Nath said, "You have to equally participate in all these. Cooking, cleaning, washing, everything", adding HC was right that it might not be a ground for cruelty.

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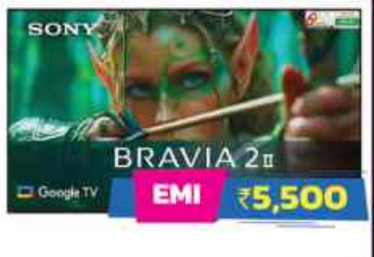

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Smartphones & the silent disruptor: How phubbing erodes social bonds

Phubbing stems largely from social media addiction and undermines people-to-people interactions

Shelley Singh

If children prefer to spend time on smartphones rather than interacting with others in a social setting, they are just phubbing. Are they just talking to friends or doom scrolling the content in social media platforms? What happens if phubbing continues?

A recent study*, published in the Current Psychology journal, sheds light on the psychological and behavioural aspects of phubbing, and reveals its profound impact on interpersonal communication and well-being.

Smartphones are an indispensable part of our daily lives. Even as they help us stay connected and productive, smartphone use has given rise to troubling social behaviour: Phubbing or the act of ignoring people around us, focusing on our phone.

The study surveyed 938 undergraduate students in the US, 48.4% men and 51.6% women, to explore how social media addiction, Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) and personality traits contribute to phubbing. Social media addiction emerged as the strongest predictor of phubbing behavior.

Students who scored high on the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) — a tool used to assess social media habits — were more likely to engage in phubbing, underscoring the addictive pull of platforms that thrive on constant engagement.

FOMO also played a notable role. Defined as the persistent anxiety that others are enjoying rewarding experiences without us, FOMO drives individuals to compulsively check their phones. This need for digital connectedness often comes at the expense of real-world relationships. While FOMO was less predictive than social media addiction, it still contributes to phubbing tendencies.

Personality traits added another layer of complexity. Students who were more conscientious, organised, disciplined, and mindful, were less likely to disrupt conversations with phone use. Similarly, extroverts, who thrive on face-to-face interactions, showed lower levels of phubbing compared to their introverted peers.

Conversely, lower emotional stability correlated with higher phone obsession, suggesting that individuals struggling with social isolation or anxiety may turn to their devices as compensatory tools.

Men reported higher phubbing scores than women. This may be linked to broader patterns of addictive behaviours, which tend to be more prevalent among men.

The implications are clear. Phubbing is not a trivial annoyance, but a behaviour rooted in psychological vulnerabilities and digital dependencies. It undermines communication, weakens trust and erodes the quality of relationships. In social contexts, the act of diverting attention to phone signals disengagement, leaving companions feeling undervalued and ignored. Phubbing is clearly a paradox of modern connectivity: While smartphones promise closeness, they often foster isolation.

This study confirms that social media addiction is the most powerful driver of phubbing, with FOMO and certain personality traits amplifying the risk. As society grapples with the costs of constant connectivity, recognising and curbing phubbing may be essential to promote genuine human interactions.

(The phubbing phenomenon: A cross-sectional study on the relationships among social media addiction, fear of missing out, personality traits, and phubbing behavior, by Li-Chiu Chi, Tseng-Chung Tang & Eugene Tang)*

KEY FINDINGS
The study analysed data from 938 undergraduate students, 48.4% men and 51.6% women, and reached the following primary conclusions
SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION: This was identified as the strongest predictor of phubbing behaviour. Individuals who are more addicted to social media are much more likely to be obsessed with their phones and trouble communicating
FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO): FOMO had significant positive correlation with phubbing. Individuals who fear missing out online are likely to ignore others for their phones
EXTRAVERSION: Introverts who exhibit high levels of phubbing may ignore people in favour of their phones
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS: It also acted as a shield by lowering the risk of communication problems
OTHER TRAITS: Personalities like friendliness or emotional stability didn't explain why individuals choose their phones over the people around them
GENDER DIFFERENCES: Unlike many previous studies, this study found that male students exhibited significantly higher levels of phubbing behaviour than female students

Ship captain underwent tests, was fit: Brother

▸ Continued from page 1

The family has appealed to the Jharkhand govt and the Centre to help bring the captain's body back as early as possible. "It has already been 48 hours since he died. We are informed that due to Eid holidays, the process is getting delayed, so we request the authorities to expedite the process and ensure that his family receives all benefits from his employer to support them as he was the sole breadwinner of the family," Rakesh's elder brother Umesh said.

"He (Rakesh) had no medical issues. Every time navy officers go sailing, they undergo tests. Rakesh was fit. We are waiting for the post-mortem report," Umesh said.

Sunil Puri, spokesperson for Elegant Marine Services, said for "operations and security reasons, we cannot disclose the location where the cargo was headed".

Rakesh is survived by wife Ranju and two sons, aged 20 and 16.

Premium petrol price hiked by ₹2/L, industrial diesel up by ₹22

Atul.Mathur@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Feeling the pinch of a surge in global crude prices, oil marketing companies on Friday increased the retail price of 95-octane premium petrol by nearly Rs 2 a litre and jacked up the rates of industrial diesel by Rs 22 a litre.

At the same time, IndianOil, the country's largest fuel retailer vowed to adopt a "responsible pricing" strategy in an indication that pump prices for normal petrol and diesel may not be raised immediately.

In a social media post, IndianOil said there is no automatic fuel price revision in India despite a surge in global fuel prices. "A limited revision applies only to premium petrol XP-95, with minimal impact on overall consumption. Through evolving global conditions, the focus remains clear: consistent supply, responsible pricing, and service you can rely on."

The retail price of normal petrol and diesel, and aviation turbine fuel, remain unchanged. Officials said less than 5% of people use the premium category of petrol in their vehicles.

Retail price of normal petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel, remain unchanged

"Some increase is reported in the premium category, which hardly makes up 2-4% of the entire petrol sold in the country," Sujata Sharma, joint secretary in the petroleum ministry told reporters. Sharma added that the prices of petrol and diesel were deregulated in 2010 and 2014, respectively, and are decided independently by oil companies.

The cost of crude for Indian refiners has soared 120% since the conflict in the Gulf broke out on Feb 28, hitting $156.29 a barrel on Friday, wiping out the profits for domestic oil marketing companies. The price of global benchmark Brent crude also reached close to $110 a barrel, nearly 50% higher than the pre-conflict price of $72.87.

Officials said the OMCs make profits when rates are low, absorbing losses when crude prices are high.

According to oil companies, high-speed diesel for industrial users in Delhi is now available at Rs 109.59 per litre. Officials in oil marketing companies said prices of this category of diesel are linked to international prices and are automatically revised every fortnight.

A litre of normal petrol - with an octane rating of 91 and suitable for standard engines - in Delhi continues to cost Rs 94.77, while the same grade of diesel costs Rs 87.67 per litre. The retail prices of normal petrol and diesel were last revised in April 2022.

India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil needs and roughly half of its natural gas requirement, which has been disrupted due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

India's air corridor shrinks as conflict in West Asia expands

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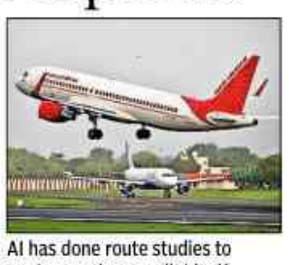
New Delhi: The "usable" corridor in West Asia — a key route for flights between India and Europe, UK and North America — is shrinking with the Israel-Iran war theatre expanding.

From Friday, Air India changed its route slightly to fly more to the southern side of Saudi Arabia after entering the country from Oman as Riyadh is also being targeted now. This has added another 20-30 minutes to its long flights.

"While as of now we are operating our schedule to Europe, the UK and North America taking the longer route, if the same gets even longer we may have to cut some of our flights as the operating costs will get even higher," an airline executive said. AI has done route studies to explore options available, if things get even worse in the Gulf.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday issued an urgent "safety advisory" in wake of the "escalation in security risks" in the region.



AI has done route studies to explore options available, if things get even worse in the Gulf

The difference between DGCA's earlier March 11 and Thursday's directive is that the airspace hazard description now includes "weapons interceptions". Now, airlines have been asked to operate above 32,000 feet in certain airspaces in Saudi and Oman that are currently being used for overflying.

Third, airlines have to now implement "robust monitoring and risk assessment processes". Finally, they have to advise crew of airborne flights with latest notice to airmen (NOTAM) and airspace restrictions.

India diversifies LPG supplies, imports 176k tonnes from US

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New Delhi: With officials calling the availability of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) "worrisome" amid the West Asia conflict, India is trying to secure the cooking gas from diversified sources, including Russia and Japan.

Officials said some cargoes had already arrived from the US, while oil refineries were deliberating with suppliers across other geographies to bridge the gap created by disruptions in supplies through the Strait of Hormuz.

India imports nearly 60% of its LPG requirement and about 90% of it comes from West Asia. To ensure unobstructed supply to domestic consumers, India has prioritised households over commercial consumers, barring hospitals and educational institutions, which now get just a fifth of their average monthly consumption. India has more than 33.2 lakh LPG connections, and annual consumption in 2024-25 was estimated at over 31 million metric tonnes.

Oil refineries were deliberating with suppliers across other geographies to bridge the gap created by disruptions in supplies via the Strait of Hormuz

While LPG supplies from West Asia take 7-8 days to reach India, officials said cargoes from the US take about 45 days, while those from Russia and Japan may take 35-40 days.

According to S&P Commodities At Sea (CAS), India's weekly LPG imports fell to 265,000 tonnes in the week to March 19, from 322,000 tonnes on March 5. Middle East inflows declined to just 89,000 tonnes in the week to March 19, the lowest share since Jan 2026. The report, however, added that alternative regional supplies increased to 176,000 tonnes, largely from the US, in the week to March 19, up from zero the previous week when the Middle East accounted for 100% of imports.

Search on for rallyist Hari, 1 more person

▸ Continued from page 1

Singhania and Hari, a five-time Indian National Rally Championship winner, were among a group of seven on the speedboat when it overturned near Felidhoo, as per reports.

Singhania and the others were rescued but the search continues for Hari and the other missing person. Family and friends are praying for their safety.

"Gautam Singhania suffered minor injuries following an unfortunate accident. He is recovering under due care in Mumbai. We thank you for the wishes and pray for the well-being of the affected friends," said a spokesperson for the industrialist.

Garcha, also a five-time national motocross champion, said they were keeping their fingers crossed. "Manik Bhimsen Bhardwaj, from Bengaluru, who was also on the boat, suffered a severe injury and his arm had to be amputated," he said.

Killing of Khamenei could reshape global terrorism risk: Report

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Bengaluru: The killing of Iran's supreme leader **Ali Khamenei** may trigger a wider, more unpredictable phase of global terrorism, warned a special supplement to 2026 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) released Thursday.

The study, which ranked Pakistan as the number one country to be affected by terrorism, and the supplement on Iran conflict were published by Institute for Economics and Peace. The Iran report notes that what began as a military confrontation is now showing signs of evolving into a diffuse, transnational threat. The immediate battlefield may be in West Asia, but the consequences, the report found, are global.

At the centre of the crisis is a fractured Iranian command structure. The strikes by the US and Israel have dismantled key military leadership, forcing Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its proxy networks to operate with far greater autonomy.

"The decentralisation of Iran's operational networks may increase the likelihood of less predictable and harder-to-detect attacks," the report states.

Iran's strategy has long relied on asymmetric warfare. Now, that playbook is expanding. "Iran's response is likely to rely heavily on asymmetric tactics, including proxy groups, criminal networks, and lone actors," the report states. This threat began to materialise within days of the strikes. Beyond individual attacks, the conflict is redrawing the map of militant activity. Iran-backed militias in Iraq, numbering at least 1.6 lakh fighters across 67 groups, have stepped up drone and missile strikes on US positions.

No connection with any foreign entity: Top cop

▸ Continued from page 1

In the files that we have that involve transnational repression, we're not seeing any connection right now with any foreign entity, based on the criminal information, the investigations that we have presently," said RCMP commissioner Mike Duheme, in an interview to CTV News.

After a dramatic reset in the relationship since Canadian PM Mark Carney assumed office last year, the two countries looked to upgrade ties with a visit by Carney to India this year.

"I'm saying that based on the totality of the files that we have on foreign interference or transnational repression, what we have in our holdings is we have people that are intimidating people, harassing people, but connecting the dots to a foreign entity, regardless of the country, we don't have that," said Duheme further, when asked whether Indian agents were still involved in transnational repression.

Dropping seat charge will lead to fare hike: Airlines

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New Delhi: Airlines are not going to comply with the new seating mandate easily. Air India Group, IndiGo and SpiceJet took on govt, which earlier this week asked them to make available at least 60% of their seats free of charge, arguing the move would lead to a hike in airfares. They have also "raised concerns regarding regulatory overreach into commercial aspects of airline operations".

AIRLINES WARN GOVT

"Seat selection fees form a legitimate component of airline revenue, particularly in the high-cost environment in India where costs rise year on year under the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) governed regime that accords full cost recovery plus an assured margin to airports," Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), which has these three airlines as its members, said in a letter to the civil aviation secretary Samir Sinha on Thursday.

Ignoring demands for financial relief to carriers, the aviation minister had recently issued the free seat directive to enable people travelling on the same PNR to be seated together without any extra charge. "Airlines operate on thin margins and rely on ancillary revenues to offset rising operational costs, including fuel, maintenance, airport charges... The financial impact of (seating) directive on airlines will be significant, compelling airlines to recover the lost revenues through increases in fares. As a result, all passengers will end up paying higher fares," it said.

Costly error: B777 burns 8-9 tonnes of fuel/hour

▸ Continued from page 1

We learn from our mistakes and the same shall never be repeated. The moment this lapse was realised, the aircraft was called back to Delhi," said a person familiar with the development.

Different countries have different protocols for the foreign airlines allowed to fly to their shores. Some allow airline-wise, some fleet-wise and some can give specific approvals for individual aircraft tail numbers. In AI's case for Canada, the approval as of now is for B777 ER version and not the LR one, said officials.

A B777 burns about 8-9 tonnes of fuel every hour, depending on wind flows and other factors. At a time when oil prices are on fire and rupee touches new lows on a daily basis, this was one mistake the loss-making airline could have done without.

An AI spokesperson said: "Air India flight AI185, operating from Delhi to Vancouver on March 19, returned to Delhi due to an operational issue and in line with established standard operating procedures. The aircraft landed safely, and all passengers and crew disembarked."

"We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused to our guests by this unforeseen situation. Our ground teams in Delhi had provided all necessary assistance, including offering hotel accommodation, while every effort was made to fly the passengers to their destination at the earliest. The flight departed this morning for Vancouver with the passengers. At Air India, the safety and well-being of our passengers and crew remain our highest priority," the spokesperson added.

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A thought for today

It's strange that words are so inadequate.
Yet, like the asthmatic struggling for breath,
So the lover must struggle for words

TS ELIOT, The Elder Statesman

Modi As Mediator?

He fits the bill. But it's a tough call

Should Modi mediate in the US-Israel vs Iran war? At least one head of govt, Finland's president, has publicly said so. Some pundits have mused about this. More important, though, is Modi ticks all the mediator boxes. Let's list them. He's prominent on the global stage. He's PM of a country that has friendly relations with all parties – US, Iran, Israel, Gulf countries. Modi has worked hard to take both India-Gulf and India-Israel relationships to the next level. He has excellent rapport with leaders of these countries. He has not let India-Iran ties suffer, either. Proof: he can talk to Iran to get some ships out through Hormuz. Yes, Trump's US has been tough to deal with, like for every other country. But, Modi's been clever in a quiet way to bring stability back to the relationship. With a trade deal nearly done, Russian oil, and probably even some Iranian oil, unsanctioned, flashpoints with US are gone.

Also, India has skin in the West Asian game – one crore Indians in Gulf, port projects in Israel and Iran, huge hydrocarbon imports, trade deals with major West Asian players, defence tech deals with Israel. Strategic autonomy has been India's mantra for decades. Modi has practised this well – assertive but pragmatic. India has enough cred to talk to all parties. But, it isn't so powerful that its intentions will be suspect – this point is crucial.

Yes, West Asia, always messy, is now a hot mess. Power, pride, and paranoia are driving the war. But, if back channels are open, some pundits reckon they are, Modi's can be another voice – a welcome one, for all parties – quietly urging disengagement. Oman and Qatar are thought to be the likely backchannel mediators. Modi's personal equations with Qatar's Emir and Oman's Sultan are excellent. Whether he should help in a mediation process, is a complex question – he has to, first, think of India's interests. But, whether he's a good choice as a mediator, is a simple question. He is.

Waist Land

Semaglutide goes off patent in India, the plot thickens

Aspiration has a new face, and waistline. America's Ozempic revolution looks to be headed to India, where the semaglutide patent has just expired. It's the key molecule in GLP-1 weight-loss drugs. One in eight adult Americans is taking such drugs already. If lower costs help make these as popular here too, yes, those thousands of crores in revenue could tot up fast.

Because, look, picture this. A monster shaadi's coming up in the family. And what's really blowing up the cousins' WhatsApp group, is that Sharma ji ki beti took it for three months, and come showtime, she was, like, a different person! Imagine one injection to replace long-winded wedding prep – diet, gym, cry, give up, buy shapewear. Peer pressure on getting in shape would be no less than to fit in a haldi ceremony, plus a mehendi night, into the couple's one week of total vacation time. The only one sulking through it all, would be the gym bro, who has suffered, sacrificed, eaten boiled chicken at birthday parties, while everyone else had cake. If others can now become snatched, for a few hundred rupees a month, without the suffering, his whole vibe will take an L.

But, of course, these are not cosmetic drugs. Semaglutide is being called a statin moment for metabolism, it's that serious. It has to be prescribed carefully, and managed carefully too. Between over-eager sellers and buyers, it's over to the doctors, and regulators, to hit the brakes.

When Saving Mothers Isn't A Good Deed

Troubling politics of global elite's approach to women's health

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS

Over the past two decades, women's health has claimed a prominent place on the global stage. Govts, multilateral agencies, and philanthropic foundations have poured in billions of dollars. High-profile conferences have become routine, while celebrities, and political leaders have amplified the urgency of addressing women's health and rights. Yet, for all this, a stark and unsettling reality persists: AIDS continues to be the leading cause of death among young women, with one woman contracting HIV every minute. And, every two minutes, a woman dies from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

In ***Sick Of It: The Global Fight for Women's Health, Sophie Harman*** interrogates this contradiction, unpacking the politics that shape global health priorities. What began as a necessary and overdue effort to correct centuries of male bias in medicine, has, in many cases, evolved into a space influenced by cynical political calculations, corporate interests, and Big Pharma priorities.

Harman begins her exploration with Rwanda, often hailed as a success story in women's health. Emerging from the devastation of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda placed women's health at the centre of its agenda. Results were remarkable: under-five child mortality dropped by 70%, deaths from malaria and AIDS declined sharply, and maternal mortality fell by an astonishing 85%. These achievements have made Rwanda a darling of international donors, and a model frequently cited in global forums.

However, Harman complicates this narrative by arguing that Rwanda's success also serves a strategic purpose. The country's impressive health outcomes are used to "healthwash" the more troubling aspects of its governance. Rwanda operates effectively as a one-party state under Paul Kagame, with allegations of political repression, restricted media freedoms, and silencing of dissent. Its involvement in regional conflicts further clouds its image. In this context, women's health achievements become a powerful tool to deflect scrutiny and maintain goodwill.

The book also examines the global obsession with "saving mothers", a central rallying point for donors and govts alike. While undeniably important, this focus has narrowed the scope of women's health. The emphasis persists because it is politically palatable – saving mothers is synonymous with saving babies, a narrative that resonates universally. Yet it also reinforces traditional gender roles, positioning women primarily as caregivers, whose labour – often unpaid and invisible – sustains families and societies, especially during crises like the Covid pandemic.

Harman further critiques policies such as the Mexico City Policy, or the "global gag rule", which restricts US funding to organisations that provide or even discuss abortion services. This represents a form of hard power in global health, where ideological positions are imposed through financial leverage. Framed as pro-life and supportive of mothers and children, such policies constrain women's autonomy, and limit access to essential healthcare.

Perhaps, most unsettling is the emergence of an industry built around women's suffering. Aid organisations often rely on personal narratives of trauma to mobilise funds, encouraging vulnerable women to share their stories, as a condition for support. In effect, women are required to perform their pain, to access services that should be fundamental rights. Men, notably, are not subjected to the same expectations. And it is in this imbalance – this unequal burden of visibility and vulnerability – that the deeper injustice of global women's health truly lies.

Two contrarian takes, from entirely different perspectives, on how West Asia war is playing out

Trump's Finding Out Why Bibi's A Problem

Columnist based in London

Jane Kinninmont

The idea of 'regime change' is prominently associated with US-led invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan. But most regime changes – meaning transition from one political system to another – happen internally. Succession crises can trigger a regime change, or splits within ruling elites, or military coups, major protest movements, etc.

Bombing a country to try and force regime change is against international law, and UN Charter; it violates prohibitions on aggression and use of force, and the right to self-determination. Wars are costly, and rarely go to plan.

Military approach of relying on air power is designed to protect the attackers, not change the political system. Bombing a country can even cause the system to double down, and the people to rally round the flag. So far, the Iranian system has managed to replace its leaders. Iran's political system was designed to withstand foreign attack, because Iran has been threatened from outside ever since the revolution.

Image: AI

That said, Iran faces internal crises – economic frustration born of corruption and mismanagement, beyond sanctions; a political system unwilling/unable to reform; even an environmental crisis. Tehran may run out of water. So, it's too early to tell whether the regime will consolidate its power for the longer term – despite early signs of this.

Few protest against authorities when bombs fall, especially when thousands of protesters were killed in Jan. But the combination – of foreign attack and internal frustrations – might lead to a deeper crisis manifesting.

That could happen quickly, through destruction and killing, or slowly, through internal divisions, and recrimination over collapse of Iran's deterrence. The regime will change in some way – but not necessarily be more democratic.

That brings us to regime change's second problem: it's easier to destroy the old, than to build the new. US said this war wouldn't include any "nation-building". Afghanistan's case in point. It's back under Taliban. But is the "plan" to just leave a vacuum? Do they believe the real mistake, in Iraq, was to get sucked into reconstruction – and not the destruction, in the first place?

Even John Bolton, arch-advocate of 'regime change' in Iran, has expressed concern – US and Israel hadn't seriously coordinated with opposition groups on the ground, or tried to persuade chunks of the military to defect to the opposition (although, they successfully recruited insiders to spy for them). Trump isn't interested in restoring Iranian monarchy, just as he wasn't interested in installing Venezuela's opposition leader – even after she gave him her Nobel Peace Prize.

US may be content to declare victory in a few weeks, saying it achieved 'regime decapitation', and crippled Iran's military. But Israel would prefer to destroy the Islamic Republic.

Despite rhetoric that bombs came to help Iran's people, some Israeli analysts acknowledge there isn't much interest in what happens 'the day after', so long as Iran's problems are no longer reaching Israel's territory. Targeting civilian infra, from Iran's offshore South Pars gas field, to centuries-old national heritage sites, adds to the impression that the goal is regime collapse, or even, potentially, state collapse.

These moves have shocked some Iranians, who initially supported the war. Full-throated support of US and Israeli attacks may prove to have been a strategic mistake for Reza Pahlavi, especially as he's in exile. This war will remain hugely divisive for Iranians, in the long term. Iranian civil society faces a long hard task, to build national consensus on key political principles, to increase chances of success of any political transition.

Israelis like to remember their positive relations with pre-revolution Iran. But Israel should consider how its bombing campaign may squander chances of any warm future relationship with post-Islamic Republic Iran.

Indeed, when Syrians overthrew Assad in 2024, Israel did not hold out offers of cooperation with a new govt. Instead, it used the window – of Syrian state's weakness – to bomb Syria's military infra, and invade parts of its territory.

Israel's security doctrine focuses on maximising its military and intelligence advantages, to defeat its enemies. It gives no place to collective security. It seems to prefer weak, demilitarised states, preoccupied with domestic problems, than strong states that can threaten it. But that isn't an interest the rest of the world can share. State failure and state collapse, in West Asia, already have had international implications on migration, security, energy, economies.

If a country's overarching security strategy is focused on "my country first", to the exclusion of other interests, or in a zero-sum way, there aren't incentives for other countries to support that. This is what Trump is finding out.

Iran Is Smart? No, Desperate

Chetan Bhagat

War coverage would have us believe, US and Israel are almost evenly locked in battle with Iran. Iran is matching – even outsmarting – US through "strategic cleverness", and "asymmetric warfare". US appears impulsive, Iran, smart, defiant, and resilient. But, this, simply, isn't true.

It isn't even close to an even fight. It's profoundly lopsided – perhaps 100:1 in favour of US-Israel. Iran's military/institutional infra is being dismantled fast. Yes, in the era of insta-reels, two or three weeks feel long. But think: a military apparatus, built over nearly five decades, is crumbling, in less than three weeks. Iran's air defence is ineffective. US and Israeli aircraft operate with increasing freedom. Senior leaders are assassinated, suggesting deep intelligence penetration. And yet, experts on TV predict American failure – insisting the war was a mistake; that US may lose. Their argument doesn't fit with ground reality. But, first, what popularises such narratives? Why does a fair section of global opinion hope for Iranian regime to prevail? Four reasons.

- David vs Goliath instinct. From Wimbledon finals to global conflicts, audiences instinctively cheer for the underdog. War is complex, but sympathy gravitates to the weaker side. We want to believe determination can overcome overwhelming odds – perhaps, because, many of us feel like underdogs in our lives. Supporting the underdog is emotionally satisfying.
- Opposition to Trump. His confrontational style, unconventional rhetoric, and polarising policies make him disliked by many. Because he started the conflict, critics hope he fails. But wars aren't popularity contests. Outcomes depend on capabilities, strategy, not opinions.
- Media incentives. War coverage is more compelling when a conflict is framed as suspenseful, and competitive. A tit-for-tat narrative attracts more eyeballs. So, even limited Iranian actions are amplified, and framed as strategic brilliance, rather than as potential signs of desperation.
- Imbalance of visuals. Images shape perception. Videos showing damage in Israel or West Asia trigger emotional reactions. Reporting from inside Iran is limited – fewer journalists, restricted internet, less visible documentation of destruction. Visual imbalance creates an illusion of parity, even if strike-volumes differ dramatically.

These emotional responses obscure a simple reality: The Numbers. Consider defence spending alone – Iran's stands at $23bn; Israel's $46bn. US? About $919bn. Nearly 40 times Iran's spend. Tehran's backers point to 'smart' tactics – regional drone attacks, closing Strait of Hormuz, or 'mosaic defence', designed to allow decentralised units to operate if leadership is disrupted. Perhaps, many Indians relate to this 'jugaad' type war strategy. However, it won't work. These resemble survival tactics, not strategic strength; fragmentation, not coordinated national defence. These are methods closer to 'irregular militias'. A decentralised defence may signal resilience, but it also reveals vulnerability, at the top.

Critics also argue US lacks clear objectives. But goals appear straightforward: eliminate Iran's ability to project power beyond its borders. That includes nuclear capability, regional proxy networks, and missile/drone strike capacity. Iran's retaliation may, in fact, reinforce international fears about its regime, rather than strengthen its position. Instead of deterring opposition, such actions risk consolidating it. What's framed as 'strategic defiance' may, in practice, strengthen adversaries' resolve.

None of this makes war admirable, or justified. War is never pretty, and violence cannot be morally sanitised. Nor is it about choosing sides. But once a war starts, analysis must rely on observable realities, not emotional preference. Yes, costs are real. Every war produces economic shockwaves. But economic pain does not indicate military success or failure.

US-Israel invested heavily in innovation, tech, and military capability. Their advantages were built over decades. Rather than romanticising weakness, experts should ask how such capabilities were developed. It's clear US and Israel are far ahead. Barring unforeseen change, the outcome doesn't depend on Iran's strategy, but on when it runs out of steam.

'Happily Ever After...Is A Loooong Time'

As marriage begins to feel a bit boring, some 'open' it up, others buy themselves a Prada

Radhika Vaz

As a stand-up comedian, I often joke that at 53, I am not in a bad marriage, but that by casual observation it could be said, I am in a boring marriage. These days my husband and I are more excited by purveyors of non-dairy pizza, than we are with one another. Unsurprisingly, I get the biggest laughs from married couples. They know the score. Long-term relationships are great, but they are very long. Very long.

It is not new news that most marriages last well past the honeymoon phase. Yet, we get by. For some, children come along, and exhaust them into not noticing. For others, careers can provide adequate validation, even excitement. For us, it is the unending search for pop-up kitchens. But there are the chosen few – they have decided that they will not fill the void with gluten-free strudel, and like a law firm that has more work than it can handle, have boldly taken on yet another partner.

Men are more likely to seek this setup than women, mainly because historically they could. They were, and as a rule still are, financially more secure. This is an important point. Because expendable income plays a key role in one's ability to maintain two major relationships. Cab fares back and forth between two residences? That would be enough to deter most men.

Although, honestly, the main reason men will do this more than women, is because women have actually given this setup some thought. This is something that only sounds like fun. In reality, not one of us wants two sets of in-laws, two sets of bro friends, and two sets of children.

Some females would prefer to buy a ridiculously overpriced handbag, than spend their hard-earned money on an extra guy, no matter how cute, interesting, or fun he may be. Gentlemen, the fact is nothing comes close to Italian leather and French design, and a woman who earns enough money to actually afford this ludicrous two-household lifestyle, is not going to opt for nurturing yet another relationship. One is headache enough.

Image: AI

Of Life And Love
STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

But regardless of who is doing what, and with whom, it is no longer a secret that the general population is a bit tired of marriage, as it stands. Besides the two-households-one-householder model, I hear open marriages, polyamory and throuples are gaining traction. And there must be several other combinations, which are meant to make till-death-do-us-part less tedious. Some of these combos I haven't even heard of, because I refuse to use AI.

Frankly, I am unclear why we are still trying to keep marriage as a concept alive. Clearly, it has run its course. The next round of children should be allowed to remain legally single, nay, they should be forced to remain legally single. For this to actually happen, everyone will have to be financially independent. And women will have to refuse to have kids. This is, frankly, a brilliant suggestion. More so, since we have enough kids to keep our population going for a while. So, I am not causing any major social disruption.

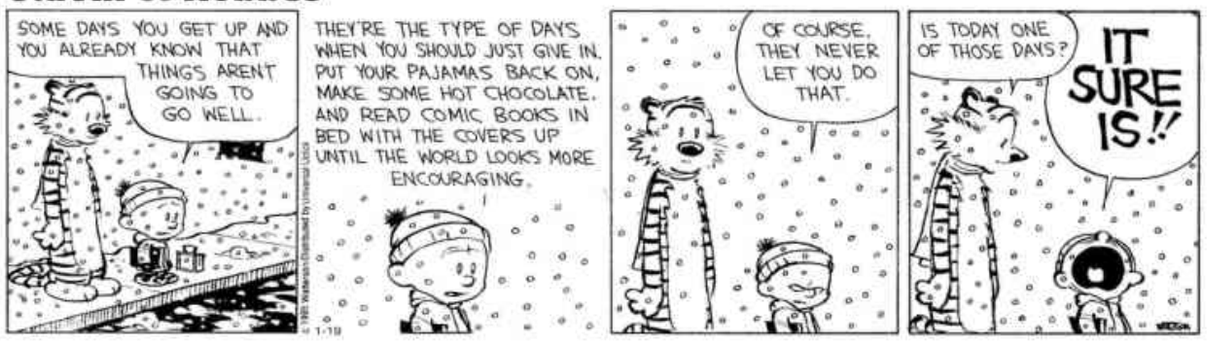
We must kill marriage, because no matter how well planned and executed all these other permutations seem, someone is always left wanting. I recently hung out with a couple, who tried to open their marriage. It was going swimmingly, as long as she was out and about. But the moment he returned the favour, all hell broke loose, and in a flash everyone went from smug to miserable.

In closing, I want to be real with you all. I too have pondered open marriage. But I have come to see, it is not for me. Not because I have a finely tuned moral compass, but because I have a finely tuned sense of reality – my chances of pulling someone new are slim to none. No one wants a middle-aged lady who carb-loads, is cranky, and needs to urinate three times a night, sometimes before she can make it to the bathroom (just kidding, maybe not).

These are not circumstances under which one throws open the gates to Eden. I keep our marriage closed to spoil his fun, not mine. Plus, I am saving for a Prada.

The writer is a standup comedian

Calvin & Hobbes


SOME DAYS YOU GET UP AND YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT THINGS AREN'T GOING TO GO WELL.
THEY'RE THE TYPE OF DAYS WHEN YOU SHOULD JUST GIVE IN. PUT YOUR PAJAMAS BACK ON, MAKE SOME HOT CHOCOLATE, AND READ COMIC BOOKS IN BED WITH THE COVERS UP UNTIL THE WORLD LOOKS MORE ENCOURAGING.
OF COURSE. THEY NEVER LET YOU DO THAT.
IS TODAY ONE OF THOSE DAYS?
IT SURE IS!!

Sacred*space*

The ego is a veil between humans and God. In prayer all are equal.

Jalaluddin Rumi

Celebrating Eid In A Time Of War

Farida Khanam

Eid is a celebration of harmony, gratitude, and peace, marked by prayer, charity, and goodwill. It is a day when families unite, and believers thank God. The festival begins with the sighting of the new moon. As soon as the crescent appears, believers say a prayer: "O God, let this moon come upon us with peace and faith." This prayer is not just a ritual but a vow that believers will be a source of safety and peace for others. By reciting this prayer, they pledge to live among people as well-wishers, to promote harmony, and spread goodwill.

Gratitude is a key part of the spirit of Eid. The Quran reminds us at the completion of Ramzan, "so that you may be grateful" (Quran 2:185). Gratitude fosters a peaceful mindset. The greeting commonly exchanged on Eid, *As-salamu alaykum* – peace be upon you – further reinforces this message. It is more than a formality; it carries a moral assurance. Islamic scholar Ibn 'Uyaynah, said, "Do you know what the greeting of salam means? It assures you that you are safe and secure from the one who offers it."

However, this year's Eid comes at a time of world unrest and anxiety. Many regions are facing war, instability, and uncertainty. These conditions demonstrate how fragile peace can be. When violence happens, the joy of festivals is clouded by worries about the future.

Ordinary people mostly carry the burden of war. Homes are wrecked, families are torn apart, and children grow up scared. Even when conflicts arise over political disputes or strategic goals, their human toll remains huge and lasting.

THE SPEAKING TREE

In Islam, war is not at all a preferred course of action. Instead, peace is presented as the natural and desired state of human life. The Quran says, "Reconciliation is best" (Quran 4:128), and instructs believers, even when compelled to fight, to respond positively when the other side seeks peace (Quran 8:61). These teachings make peace not just a passive idea but an active duty.

A clear historical example of this strategy is the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah. When Muslims were blocked from entering Mecca to perform Umrah, negotiations resulted in a peace agreement with the Quraysh. Although the terms seemed unfavorable for Muslims, they were accepted to establish peace. The outcome demonstrated that temporary compromises can lead to long-term stability and progress.

In today's interconnected world, peace is even more absolutely essential than ever. Conflict disrupts trade, triggers humanitarian crises, and increases global insecurity. Eid, therefore, is more than a celebration; it carries a broader message: to create a more humane and peaceful world.

The writer is chairperson, Centre for Peace and Spirituality International, New Delhi

TIMES BUSINESS
THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026

The Week That Was...

Iran War, HDFC Bank Drag Mts, Value Buying Cushions Loss

Sensex and Nifty fell 3.3% each on Thursday, their worst session since June 4, 2024. However, they ended the week down 0.04% and 0.16%, helped by value buying earlier, and a partial rebound on Friday

Sensex -0.04%

Sensex Gainers

Eternal	7.7%
Tata Steel	7.2%
Mahindra & Mahindra	4.6%

Laggards

HDFC Bank	-4.5%
HUL	-3.6%
Bharat Electronics	-3%

GOLD -6.7% | CRUDE 12.2% | BITCOIN -1.1%

$102bn
Was India's trade deficit with China in the April-Feb period, as against $91.1bn in the corresponding period last year

Source: screener.in, ETIG, Reuters

Travel to laundry: Cos pass on price hikes, budgets to get hit

Price Of War: Fear Of Job Losses In Labour-Intensive Sectors Grows

Asmita.Dey@timesofindia.com

CONSUMER WALLETS TO GET LIGHTER

- **Godrej Appliances** to hike prices by **5-10%**
- **Bisleri** raises prices by **11%**
- **TV sets** to have an **added impact of 1-2%** on pricing due to war led disruptions
- **Home interior firm DesignCafe** to increase prices for new consumers by **10-15%**
- Some **laundry firms** raise service pricing
- **Airlines** have begun **levying fuel surcharge** making travelling more expensive
- **FMCG** firms indicate price hikes from April
- **Restaurants fear job losses** if war continues
- **Discretionary spending** like dining out and travel **could weaken first**

Mumbai: As the West Asia war rages on, India's middle class has begun bearing the brunt. From airfares to air-conditioners, home interiors, bottled water and even regular laundry services, companies across segments are starting to take price hikes to cope with inflating input costs on the back of supply disruptions and soaring oil, derivatives of which are key to the manufacturing of a lot of components used in daily products. Much of the price increases will hit the markets from April, industry executives said.

Godrej Appliances will take price hikes of 5%-10% across categories including ACs, washing machines and refrigerators from next month, a company spokesperson said. In the case of white goods and broader durables, volatile commodity (metals like copper etc) costs and new energy norms had already nudged companies to implement price increases; the war has only exacerbated the situation by triggering gas supply crunch and shortage of raw materials such as plastic.

Lack of availability of memory and SoC chips have continuously been pushing up prices of television sets and now with the war-led disruption, there is expected to be another 1%-2% impact on prices, said Arjun Bajaj, director at Videotex which manufactures TVs for brands. Polymer prices, for instance, which are used in cabinet parts, cables and insulation materials have increased by nearly 40%-50% per kg in recent days while cost of packaging materials has gone up 80%, said Bajaj.

With input costs rising across materials such as plywood, adhesives, hardware, Bengaluru-headquartered home interior firm DesignCafe will be implementing price hikes in the range of 10%-15% for new customers from April 1. "There is also growing uncertainty around material availability in the coming weeks due to fluctuating stock levels across the supply chain," said CEO & co-founder Shezaan Bhojani. Some suppliers have also introduced temporary surcharges for 30 to 60 days, with a wait-and-watch approach thereafter, said Tanuj Choudhary, co-founder & COO at HomeLane.

New Delhi-based laundry firm Perfecto Cleaners is now implementing an increase in service pricing as the shift to electric alternatives from LPG has led to rise in expenses, said founder Kshitij Rajpal. The turn around time for stores dependent on gas supplies are suffering, said Arunabh Sinha, founder at Ucle-an. Bisleri has raised the rates of its packaged water bottles by 11%. The impact of the war is far and wide, touching almost every sector.

Indian carriers Air India, IndiGo and Akasa Air have already started levying a fuel surcharge which means air tickets will become more expensive. "Discretionary spending like dining out and travel could weaken first," said analysts at The Knowledge Company in a recent study. Besides the strain on consumer pockets, there's also growing apprehension of job losses in labour intensive sectors such as restaurants if the turmoil persists, giving the common man more reasons to worry. "Fund flow is certainly an issue now. There are no job cuts yet but if this gets prolonged, then there will definitely be," said Mumbai-based restaurateur and NRAI vice-president Pranav Rungta.

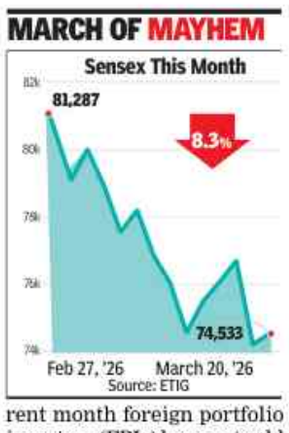
FMCG firms may raise MRP

The full effect of the rise in plastics and logistics costs will start playing out by next month. If the situation persists, many FMCG companies will be forced to increase their MRPs to manage the high-cost environment, said Piruz Khambatta, group chairman at Rasna. "Our focus is on ensuring accessibility through the right product mix and formats. At the same time, we will continue to monitor the external environment and take appropriate action should the need arise," said Rakshit Hargave, MD & CEO at Britannia.

FPI outflow nears record at ₹93.7k cr

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

MARCH OF MAYHEM



Mumbai: Net selling by foreign funds in the stock market is on track to break the all-time monthly record as rupee this month has been weakening to record lows at regular intervals and rising crude oil prices are threatening India's macro fundamentals as the war in West Asia is continuing without any sign of de-escalation.

So far in the month, foreign portfolio investors have taken out Rs 93,698 crore from the stock market alone, data combined from NSDL and BSE showed. This is less than Rs 500 crore from the biggest net outflow number that was recorded in Oct 2024, at Rs 94,017 crore, NSDL data showed.

On an average, in the current month foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have net sold stocks worth almost Rs 7,000 crore, withfive trading sessions remaining in the month (markets are closed on Mar 26 and Mar 31).

On Friday, the FPIs took out Rs 5,518 crore net from the market although the sensex closed with a 326-point gain, a marginal reversal from the brutal Thursday session that saw nearly 2,500 points shaved off the index. So far in the month, the sensex has lost a little over 6,750 points or 8.3% mainly because of the war-induced FPI selling that also weakened the rupee.

Like in the last few weeks, Friday's session was also marked by high volatility with sensex rallying by over 1,000 points in early trades only to witness strong profit booking. At close the index was up just 0.4% at 74,533 points. On a weekly basis, the index has barely moved: The previous Friday (Mar 13) it had closed at 74,563 points. On the NSE, Nifty too showed high volatility and closed at 23,115 points, up 112 points (0.4%).

During the day, traders preferred to reduce their risks ahead of the weekend with heightened uncertainty, particularly due to the ongoing war between the US-Israel and Iran market players said.

According to Nagaraj Shetti, Senior Technical Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, the near-term trend for Nifty remains weak and present bounce back could be a sell on the rise opportunity. "A weakness below 22,900 points could open the next downside target of 22,500 points in the near term. However, the immediate resistance is placed at 23,380 points."

Global shares fell for a third straight session on worries the Iran war would keep upward pressure on oil prices and rekindle inflation.

RBI defends Re, forex reserves down $7.1bn

Mumbai: RBI's defence of the rupee has resulted in India's forex reserves falling by $7.1 billion to $709.8 billion in the week ended March 13, driven by a sharp drop in foreign currency assets even as gold cushioned the fall.

Reserves declined from $716.8 billion in the previous week, with foreign currency assets down $7.7 billion. Gold rose $664 million, partly offsetting the decline. Bankers said that the impact of RBI intervention on forex reserves is much higher if one takes into account future liabilities of RBI arising out of sale of dollars in the forward market.

Reserves tracked a steady rise through FY26 before reversing late in the year. They climbed from $676.3 billion on April 4, 2025 to a peak of $728.5 billion on Feb 27 this year, then fell by around $19 billion in early March. According to the trend, the late-Feb peak marked a turning point as valuation shifts pulled reserves lower in successive weeks. TNN

Rupee has weakened by 266p since war began

▶Continued from page 1

Since the beginning of March 2026, the rupee has weakened by 266 paise, slipping from Rs 91.05 against the dollar at the end of Feb to 93.71 now.

The decline is sharper over a longer horizon, with the currency down 386 paise since the start of 2026, from Rs 89.85 at the end of 2025. The slide is even more pronounced on a year-on-year basis, with the rupee depreciating by 826 paise since April 1, 2025; it stood at Rs 85.45 at the end of March 2025. Until Jan 2026, the median forecast of all analysts was $63.3 per barrel, and the March-end exchange rate was estimated at Rs 90.8 against the dollar. The most extreme forecast for crude oil was $69 per barrel, while the most pessimistic exchange rate forecast was Rs 93 to the dollar. RBI analysis estimated that a $10 increase in crude oil slows GDP growth by 15 basis points and raises inflation by 20 basis points. According to ICRA, a $10 per barrel increase in crude oil can raise the oil import bill by $13-14 billion and widen the current account deficit by 0.3% of GDP.

Rupee Down 386p vs $ Since Start Of Year

$ vs Other Currencies	Jan 1,'26	March 20,'26	% Change
Russian Rouble	78.75	83.37	-5.9
Korean Won	1442.65	1504.03	-4.3
Thai Baht	31.48	32.8	-4.2
Indian Rupee	**89.96**	**93.7**	-4.2
Turkish Lira	42.95	44.32	-3.2
Singapore Dollar	1.29	1.28	0.3
British Pound	1.35	1.33	1.2
Chinese Renminbi	6.99	6.89	1.5
Euro	1.17	1.15	1.8
Brazilian Real	5.48	5.29	3.5

Source: Eikon
Compiled by: ETIG Database

RBI board approves dividend

Mumbai: The RBI central board, led by governor Sanjay Malhotra, cleared the FY26 accounts and dividend at its 622nd meeting in Patna, with forex-driven gains set to lift payouts amid rupee swings. The board approved RBI's FY27 budget and Utkarsh 3.0 for 2026-29. Discussions covered the evolving global and domestic economic landscape, including geopolitical tensions. TNN

Gold slips 7%, logs worst week in 6 yrs

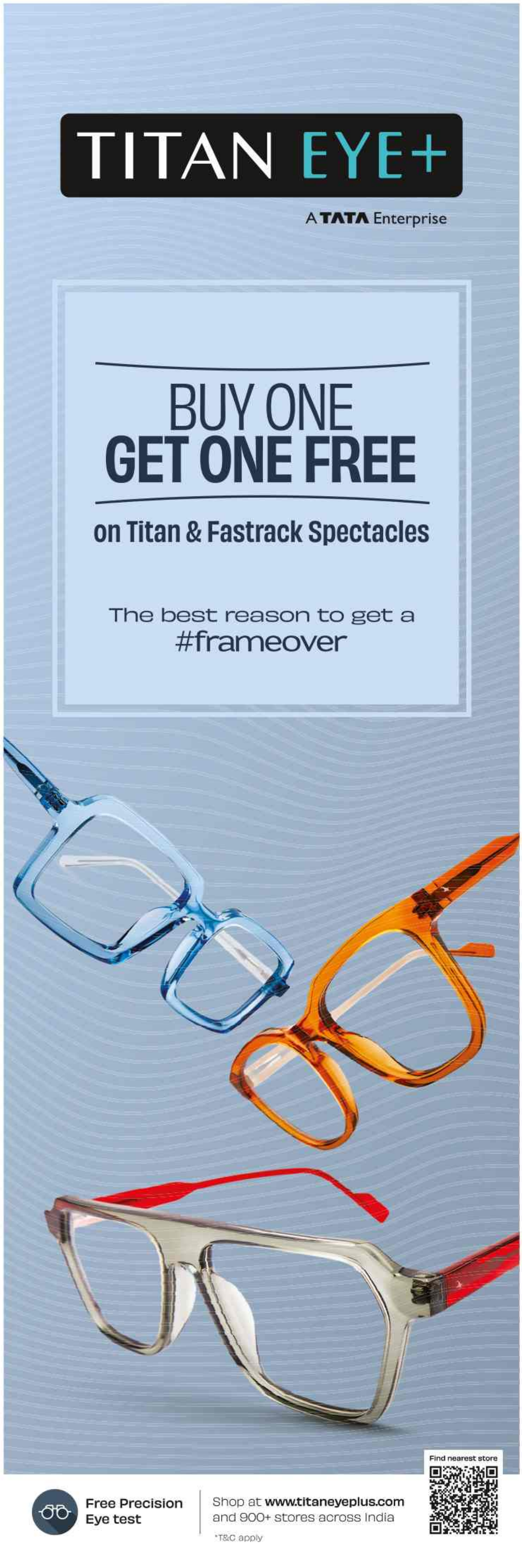
Gold headed for the biggest weekly loss in six years, as war in West Asia boosted energy prices and reduced expectations for interest-rate cuts.

Bullion — little changed near $4,660 an ounce on Friday — is down more than 7% this week, the most since March 2020. Soaring crude, natural gas and fuel prices triggered by the conflict are raising inflation concerns, reducing prospects of central banks lowering rates. That hurts gold as it doesn't pay interest. In Delhi, gold of 99.9 per cent purity extended its losses for the third consecutive day, declining by Rs 650, or 0.4%, to Rs 1,52,650 per 10 grams, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 1,53,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Analysts said gold prices remain under pressure due to macroeconomic uncertainties and global cues favouring the US dollar.

The metal — widely viewed as a haven — has dropped every week since the US and Israel attacked Iran on Feb 28. The retreat has come as US treasury yields and the dollar gained ground, investors sold bullion to cover losses elsewhere, and gold-backed ETFs posted outflows, with global holdings erasing all their additions since the start of the year. "Do not buy the dip — there's way too much volatility," said Robert Gottlieb, a former precious-metals trader at JPMorgan Chase & Co. and now an independent market commentator. Until the volatility starts to decrease and prices start to consolidate, there may be more selling, he said.

The recent volatility can be attributed to a hawkish stance from the US Federal Reserve, which met midweek to assess policy, opting to leave rates unchanged as widely expected. AGENCIES



$10bn support for Essar's Mesabi Metallics in US

Mumbai: Essar Group's Mesabi Metallics, an iron ore mining and manufacturing project in Minnesota, US, will receive $10 billion in support from the US Export-Import Bank (EXIM). The group has been expanding its overseas play after losing control of its steel business in India. Mesabi is building an integrated iron ore mining and processing facility to produce about 7MT of high-grade direct-reduction iron ore pellets annually. TNN

Zomato raises platform fee to Rs 14.9 per order

Bengaluru: Food delivery firm Zomato has increased its platform fee to Rs 14.9 per order from Rs 12.5 earlier, marking a nearly 19% hike as the company sharpens its focus on profitability. The platform fee is a fixed charge levied on each order. While the Rs 2.4 increase may appear modest for users, it can scale up significantly given the company's large order volumes. TNN

Thomas Cook India to demerge resort biz

New Delhi: Thomas Cook India on Friday said it will demerge its resorts and resort management business into Sterling Holiday Resorts Limited (SHRL), paving the way for the future listing of the company's wholly-owned arm. The board of Thomas Cook (India) has given an in-principle approval to the demerger proposal. AGENCIES

FM to officials: Make taxpayers' life simpler

'Keep A Fresh Mindset, Ensure Simple Regime'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday asked tax officials to make a new beginning, urging them to ensure a simple and stable regime, and work with the motto of making life simpler for taxpayers.

"You are not just tax collectors. You are the face of the govt's relationship with the taxpayer. The new law gives you a clearer, leaner framework. However, a good law alone is not enough — it must be administered with empathy, fairness, and efficiency… Chhodo kal ki baatein, kal ki baat purani — aao milkar likhenge hum income tax ki nayi kahani," the FM said, while urging officials to work with a fresh mindset.

On a day when the income tax rules were released in time for the new law to kick in from next month, Sitharaman pointed out that the new Income Tax Act will make life simpler for businesses and individuals.

> I urge income tax officers to treat this PRARAMBH as an opportunity to embrace a fresh mindset — one that moves away from enforcement-driven approaches to trust-based engagement… ***Chhodo Kal Ki Baatein, Kal Ki Baat Purani— Aao Milkar Likhenge Hum Income Tax Ki Nayi Kahani***
>
>
>
> —NIRMALA SITHARAMAN | FM

"At a fundamental level, a simple and clear income tax law reduces ambiguity — so people know exactly what is expected of them. That directly lowers errors, disputes, and compliance costs. Today, most of the individual taxpayers have already moved to the new tax regime. That tells you something — when you give people simplicity, they embrace it willingly," she said.

Launching a campaign titled PRARAMBH — Policy Reform and Responsible Action for Mission Viksit Bharat — she flagged six priorities for officers. She asked them to interact with taxpayers, including going down to tehsils, to create awareness and use local language.

FM also urged them to aggressively reduce litigation, use technology to reduce human interactions with taxpayers and also to arrest evasion.

"Make paying taxes so easy that honesty becomes the natural choice. But those who are wilfully evading, those who are deliberately trying to get away — technology must catch them. Data analytics, AI-driven risk assessment, information sharing across systems — deploy every tool available to ensure that evasion does not go undetected. The message should be simple: If you are honest, the system will make your life easy. If you are evading, the system will find you," she said.

Weight-loss therapy costs set to be lower by up to 90%

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Weight-loss therapy costs are set to reduce substantially by up to 90%, with generic versions of injectable semaglutide are expected to hit pharmacy shelves from March 21. The move kicks off one of the most closely watched price wars in the high-stakes obesity and diabetes drug market.

This is in the wake of the innovator Novo Nordisk's patent on semaglutide, the key ingredient in these therapies, expiring on Friday. Two drugmakers including Natco Pharma and Eris Lifesciences announced plans to roll out the pen-filled jabs over 50% cheaper than the innovator's price, in April. Interestingly, in a bid to lower the therapy cost further, they are also introducing vials at Rs 1,300 per month — about 90% cheaper than the innovator brand Ozempic.

The vial will need to be administered through a syringe by a trained hand. More companies including Sun Pharma, Zydus and Dr Reddy's are expected to join the high-growth Rs 1,500 crore therapy market on Day 1 (March 21).

Blockbuster therapies — Wegovy and Mounjaro — marketed by Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly respectively, were launched at "India-specific prices" last year, while global bestseller Ozempic by the Dutch firm, made its India debut in Dec last year. Semaglutide, a GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) receptor agonist, helps to control blood sugar and improve satiety, reducing cravings for food, eventually inducing weight-loss.

Natco plans to launch a semaglutide pen device in April starting at Rs 4,000 per month. The innovator Novo Nordisk's Ozempic is priced at Rs 8,800 per month for the lowest strength. It is also introducing multi-dose vials starting at Rs 1,290 per month.

Natco said: "It is the most affordable GLP-1 in Indian market as it is around 70% cheaper than pen device, and 90% cheaper than the price of the innovator's brand. This will increase patient accessibility to the GLP-1 therapy and would help in long term compliance for the patients."

Flipkart group CFO Sriram Venkataraman to step down

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Bengaluru: Walmart-owned e-commerce firm Flipkart on Thursday said its group chief financial officer Sriram Venkataraman is quitting the firm, marking a key leadership change as the company prepares for its next phase of growth and a potential public listing.

Venkataraman will remain with the company for a period to ensure continuity and a smooth handover, Flipkart said. During this transition, Ravi Iyer will oversee the broader finance organisation. Flipkart group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy said Venkataraman played a key role in building and strengthening the firm's finance function. The move comes as Flipkart tightens its leadership structure ahead of a potential IPO and sharpens its focus on profitability and scale, amid rising competition from Amazon in India's ecommerce market.

The development also coincides with the return of Nishant Verman, who will join as senior vice-president for corporate development and partnerships, focusing on strengthening strategic initiatives and alliances. Verman rejoins the company after founding cross-border exports platform Bzaar, which enables US retailers to source from India.

105% bonus payout for staff in 2025

Flipkart has also informed employees of a 105% bonus payout for 2025, reflecting progress across operational, financial and people metrics, according to an internal communication. The payout for senior director-level employees and below is expected in March, while senior vice presidents and above will receive it after the performance review cycle. The company continues to expand across verticals including fashion, travel, wholesale and fintech, with over 500 million registered users and more than 1.4 million sellers on its platform

HDFC sacks employees for AT1 bond mis-selling

Termination Of Three Staff Members Follows Probe Into Actions In Bank's DIFC Branch

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: HDFC Bank has terminated three employees, including senior executives, after an internal probe into the alleged mis-selling of Credit Suisse AT-1 bonds to NRI clients at its UAE operations. The action follows regulatory scrutiny and investor complaints. Shares of the bank closed down 2.4%, continuing Thursday's decline following the sudeen resignation of the bank's chairman Atanu Chakraborty.

The employees dismissed include Sampath Kumar, group head of branch banking, Harsh Gupta, EVP for Middle East, Africa and NRI business, and Payal Mandhyan, SVP, for their roles in selling high-risk AT-1 bonds through the bank's Dubai branch, in an episode that began in Jan 2025 and has since drawn attention to persistent concerns around such instruments after the Credit Suisse collapse.

In response to a query, HDFC bank said, "The bank identified certain gaps in client onboarding requirements at its DIFC branch in the UAE and has completed a detailed and objective review of the matter. Appropriate remedial actions have been taken in line with internal policies. Personnel changes have been undertaken along with appropriate action as per the bank's conduct regulation."

HEADS ROLL IN UAE

- The employees dismissed include Sampath Kumar, group head of branch banking, Harsh Gupta, EVP for Middle East, Africa and NRI business, and Payal Mandhyan, SVP
- The episode began in Jan 2025 and has since drawn attention to persistent concerns around such instruments after the Credit Suisse collapse

AT-1 bonds are debt instruments with equity-like features. They offer higher yields but do not appreciate like equity, and the issuer's liabilities can be extinguished if the bank's net worth is impaired. In the event of bankruptcy, these instruments rank lowest among fixed income securities for repayment priority.

According to allegations, staff in the Dubai and Bahrain branches persuaded NRI clients to shift FCNR deposits from India to Bahrain by presenting the bonds as fixed-maturity products with assured returns. Investors were asked to sign blank documents, and key disclosures on the perpetual nature and high risk of AT-1 bonds were omitted.

These bonds were later written off during the UBS-led bailout of Credit Suisse, leading to losses for investors. The probe began in Jan 2025 after complaints from NRI investors and led to the suspension of Harsh Gupta and Payal Mandhyan.

The bank's internal investigation, conducted amid restrictions imposed by the Dubai Financial Services Authority, concluded on March 18 resulting in the terminations. The episode follows the abrupt resignation of non-executive chairman Atanu Chakraborty, who cited concerns over practices inconsistent with his values and ethics.

Govt invites bids to build 5 rare earth magnet units

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Chennai: The ministry of heavy industries has invited bids to set up five integrated facilities to manufacture sintered NdFeB (neodymium-iron-boron) magnets, a segment in which the country remains wholly import-dependent. Under the scheme, each unit must produce a minimum of 600 tonnes per annum (TPA), scalable up to 1,200 TPA, with a total national capacity target of up to 6,000 MTPA.

NdFeB magnets are indispensable to electric vehicles, wind turbines and modern weaponry. The incentive package includes sales-linked support capped at Rs 2,150 per kg and a 15% capital subsidy on eligible investments. The scheme will run for seven years, with contracts awarded to bidders seeking the lowest subsidy.

India, however, is not short of raw materials. It possesses some of the world's largest rare earth reserves, mostly along its coasts. IREL, a state-owned firm under the Department of Atomic Energy, already mines and refines these into oxides.

Its current output of NdPr oxide—about 400 tonnes a year, along with a stockpile of 500 tonnes—could support roughly 1,500 tonnes of magnet production. Yet a notable gap persists in the middle of the value chain. The conversion of oxides into metals, alloys and finished magnets has yet to take root at scale. Under the plan, IREL will supply raw material to three winning bidders., while the rest will have to source it independently.

TVS Capital invests ₹500 cr in Neo Group

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: TVS Capital Funds has invested Rs 500 crore in Neo Wealth & Asset Management at a pre-money valuation of Rs 10,000 crore.

Neo Wealth Management operates with nearly 150 senior wealth advisors, catering primarily to ultra-high-networth individuals (UHNIs) and family offices.

The investment marks TVS Capital's first bet in the wealth management space. Existing investors include Peak XV Partners, MUFG Bank and Euclidean Capital, which have backed the firm across multiple rounds since inception.

Commenting on the investment, Shyam Srinivasan, chairman of the financial services advisory board at TVS Capital Funds, said, "Nitin and his team have built something with genuine depth — in advisor talent, in platform rigour, and in leadership clarity." Nitin Jain, chairman and MD of Neo Group, said, "Our objective has always been to build an enduring institution with strong governance, disciplined capital allocation and client-first alignment."

Ola Elec seeks nod to shift ₹575cr to debt repayment

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Ola Electric Mobility has proposed another revision in the utilisation of its IPO proceeds, reallocating Rs 575 crore from research and product development towards debt repayment and growth initiatives, according to a stock exchange filing.

The company's board, at its March 18 meeting, approved the proposed change in the utilisation of its Rs 5,500 crore IPO proceeds, subject to shareholder approval. Under the revised plan, Rs 475 crore will be redirected towards repayment or prepayment of debt, while Rs 100 crore will be allocated to organic growth initiatives. The funds will be drawn from the previously earmarked R&D budget.

TRIMS R&D SPENDS

Following the changes, allocation towards R&D will be reduced to Rs 930 crore from Rs 1,505 crore earlier. Meanwhile, the outlay for debt repayment will increase to Rs 870 crore from Rs 395 crore, and funds for organic growth initiatives will rise to Rs 1,300.6 crore. The company said there is no change in other key IPO objectives, including capital expenditure for expanding cell manufacturing capacity and general corporate purposes.

Overall, the total IPO size and the amount of unutilised funds remain unchanged at Rs 5,500 crore and about Rs 1,295 crore, respectively, as of March. This marks the second revision in the use of IPO proceeds by the Bhavish Aggarwal-led company, following an earlier change approved by shareholders in Aug last year.

Ecolab to buy CoolIT for nearly $4.8 bn

Ecolab said on Friday it will acquire CoolIT Systems from KKR for about $4.75 billion in cash, as the water solutions firm seeks to capitalise on surging demand for liquid cooling in artificial intelligence-driven data centres.

Shares of the water management company were down 1% in premarket trading. Technology companies have been ramping up spending on AI infrastructure, driving a shift from traditional air cooling to more efficient liquid-based systems capable of handling higher chip densities and power loads. Owned by funds managed by KKR, CoolIT designs and manufactures liquid cooling systems used by hyperscale and colocation operators.

Ecolab expects CoolIT's hardware and thermal engineering to complement its strengths in water, chemistry and digital monitoring, helping it become a more complete provider of cooling and fluid management. CoolIT is likely to generate about $550 million in sales over the next 12 months, Ecolab said. The deal is expected to close in the third quarter of 2026. REUTERS

Nvidia to supply 1mn GPUs to AWS

San Francisco: Nvidia will sell 1 million graphics processing unit chips, along with a host of other offerings, to Amazon.com's cloud computing unit by 2027, a Nvidia executive told Reuters on Thursday.

Nvidia and Amazon Web Services said this week that AWS had reached a deal to buy 1 million GPUs but had not disclosed the precise timing. Ian Buck, VP of hyperscale and high-performance computing at Nvidia, told Reuters the sales will start this year and extend through 2027. Nvidia and Amazon did not disclose the financial terms of the deal. But Buck told Reuters the transaction includes a broad mix of Nvidia chips beyond the 1 million GPUs, including Nvidia's Spectrum networking chips and Groq chips that Nvidia released this week.

AWS plans to use a combination of Nvidia's Groq chips, along with six others from Nvidia, for more efficient inference — the process by which AI systems generate answers and carry out tasks on behalf of users. "Inference is hard. It's wickedly hard," Buck told Reuters. "To be the best at inference, it is not a one-chip pony. We actually use all seven chips." REUTERS

Accenture to ramp up entry-level recruitment

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Accenture is set to ramp up hiring in the coming quarters, backed by steady demand and its ongoing talent strategy. "So for us, headcount, we expect our headcount to increase in the second quarter based upon the demand that we see. Really, this is a continuation of the talent rotation that we discussed at the beginning of the fiscal year. We expect to add headcount in the second quarter, in the second half," said CFO Angie Park.

Accenture added 2,741 employees during the quarter, taking its total workforce to 786,432. CEO Julie Sweet also pointed to strong hiring momentum, saying, "Thanks to our intentional talent strategy, we will hire more entry-level reinventors in FY 2026 than FY 2025, which is important for our financial model. Just as our clients must reinvent, so must Accenture."

Park added that the company has about 3,000 employees in West Asia, a region that contributed roughly $1 billion, or about 1% of its FY25 revenue. Accenture reported revenue of $18 billion for the second quarter of FY26, marking a 4% year-on-year increase in local currency and 8% in dollar terms, driven by growth across geographies. Accenture follows a September–August financial year.

The Americas, Europe, Middle East and Asia Pacific posted local currency growth of 4%, 3% and 9%, respectively. All industry verticals grew except healthcare, which declined 1%. Communications and financial services led with 9% growth each, while products rose 3% and resources 2%.

"Our goal with acquisitions is to more rapidly expand into higher growth areas with attractive margins, which will fuel organic growth and, increasingly, help us grow non-FTE related revenue," Sweet said.

The company has been investing in areas such as data centres, cybersecurity and energy infrastructure, deploying $1.6 billion across three acquisitions so far this year, with plans to invest up to $5 billion in total.

New bookings stood at $22.1 billion, up 6% in US dollar terms, taking total bookings for the first half to $43 billion. Operating margin improved 30 basis points year-on-year to 13.8%, even as the company continued to invest in business and talent.

Accenture now expects full-year revenue growth of 3% to 5% in local currency, or 4% to 6% excluding an estimated 1% impact from its US federal business. Based on Q2 performance, it narrowed its guidance range from 2%–5% earlier. For Q3, it forecasts growth of 1% to 5%.

"Our guidance reflects our confidence in what we are seeing at the account, and we haven't seen our clients, and we haven't seen anything yet being impacted by the war. But obviously, there is a lot of uncertainty because of the war, but we're very confident based on the information we have right now on what we see for the next two quarters," Sweet told analysts. Operating margin guidance remains at 15.7% to 15.9%.

Q2 EARNINGS

Revenue:	Bookings	Guidance
$18bn (Q2 FY26)	Q2 bookings: $22.1bn (+6%)	FY26 revenue growth: 3–5% (local currency)
Growth: +4% (local currency), +8% (USD)	H1 bookings: $43bn	4–6% excluding 1% US federal impact
Operating margin: 13.8% (+30 bps YoY)		

> Thanks to our intentional talent strategy, we will hire more entry-level reinventors in FY 2026 than FY 2025, which is important for our financial model. Just as our clients must reinvent, so must Accenture
>
> **Julie Sweet** | CEO, ACCENTURE

DocuSign reinvents contracts with AI push

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Bengaluru: For over two decades, DocuSign has been synonymous with one thing: e-signatures. Today, the Nasdaq-listed company is trying to rewrite that identity—using artificial intelligence and large language models (LLMs) to turn contracts from static documents into dynamic, data-rich assets. This shift marks one of its most significant strategic pivots since inception.

"We were founded to bring contracts online at a time when no one thought it was a good idea — not regulators, not companies, and not consumers," said CEO Allan Thygesen. "But we persevered, and we remain the category leader in executing contracts online."

Now, the company is moving beyond its flagship product to position itself as an end-to-end agreement management provider for enterprises through its Intelligent Agreement Management (IAM) platform, which uses AI to extract and act on contract data at scale.

The timing of this pivot is no coincidence. Thygesen joined in October 2022—just weeks before the launch of ChatGPT. "It didn't take long for us to realize this was a fundamental shift in our ability to handle unstructured data," he said.

Historically, contracts were "dumb flat files"—PDFs with little machine-readable intelligence. Early AI models were "heavy and brittle," but LLMs have changed that. By analysing millions of completed agreements, DocuSign can now extract insights such as renewal timelines, performance metrics and negotiation levers.

> We were founded to bring contracts online at a time when no one thought it was a good idea — not regulators, not companies, and not consumers… But we persevered, and we remain the category leader in executing contracts online
>
> **Allan Thygesen** | CEO, DOCUSIGN

"Whether you're a CFO, procurement officer, sales leader, or HR leader, you can now understand what's in your agreement and what to do next," Thygesen said.

This also addresses the "agreement trap," where workflows remain slow and opaque despite digitisation. AI helps streamline processes and unlock insights, reducing turnaround times and improving visibility across departments.

But enterprise-grade AI contracts cannot rely solely on public models. "The short answer is no," Thygesen said, noting that such models lack access to private agreements. Instead, DocuSign leverages over 150 million private, consented agreements, improving accuracy significantly.

The company reported $3.2 billion in FY2026 revenue, up 8% year-on-year, driven by subscription growth. Its fiscal year ended in Jan.

Trust, data and workflow integration form its core moat, with sensitive data anonymised before generating insights. This approach helps address enterprise concerns around confidentiality and regulatory compliance.

India is emerging as a key hub for this transformation. The company's engineering centre, set up over two years ago, has more than 300 employees and is expected to cross 500 by year-end. Teams here are building critical components such as the MCP server and core IAM integrations with platforms like SAP and Workday.

"It's been an amazing progress and makes India a very strategic part of our R&D effort," Thygesen said.

With over 25,000 customers on IAM, DocuSign is now shifting to function-specific solutions for sales, procurement and HR, while expanding its consumption-based pricing.

Even as competition intensifies, Thygesen remains clear: "The next phase of growth for DocuSign is very much AI-enabled."

Zetwerk to confidentially file for $550 million IPO soon

Mumbai/Chennai/Bengaluru: Zetwerk is preparing to confidentially file draft papers for an initial public offering within the next one to two weeks, aiming to raise up to $550 million at a valuation of about $4 billion, according to two people with direct knowledge.

The contract electronics manufacturer's IPO includes about $300 million in fresh equity, with the remainder coming from an offer for sale, the sources said. Zetwerk is targeting a listing later this year and has mandated Kotak as lead banker, alongside Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, Pantomath Capital Advisors, JM Financial and HSBC, the sources said.

Zetwerk declined to comment, while the banks did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment. Reuters reported in November that Zetwerk had hired banks to prepare draft IPO papers for a March filing. Last March, Zetwerk CEO and co-founder Amrit Acharya said the company was considering a listing within 24 months. India was the world's second-largest IPO market in 2025, LSEG data showed, but sentiment has weakened this year after a selloff in technology services stocks, with recent listings such as Fractal Analytics and Shadowfax Technologies struggling on debut. REUTERS

TIMES SPORT

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026

RONNIE O' SULLIVAN MAKES SNOOKER HISTORY WITH HIGHEST-EVER BREAK OF 153 IN WORLD OPEN

LEBRON JAMES PLAYS 1,611TH GAME, EQUALS NBA RECORD FOR REGULAR-SEASON APPEARANCES

AN AUDITION FOR RELEVANCE

The Format Is Different, The Stakes Are Not. IPL-2026 Could Help Decide Whether Rohit Sharma & Virat Kohli Will Figure In India's Plans For The 2027 ODI World Cup...

Pix: TOI, Getty Images

VIRAT KOHLI

ROHIT SHARMA

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Quick quiz: Since the first T20 World Cup in 2007, how many players who played only ODI cricket have been part of a 50-over World Cup-winning side? Answer: None. In 2027, across Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Rohit and Kohli would love to change that. Assuming, of course, that they will be picked.

Having retired from Tests and T20Is, they now occupy a curious space: giant names, shrinking game-time. Which is why this IPL matters so much. It is their most visible audition. If both want to convince a team management and selection panel that has become increasingly ruthless and pragmatic, they need to perform over the next eight weeks for Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, respectively.

That may sound dramatic. After all, few players have achieved more. But the road to the 2027 ODI World Cup will not be paved by reputation or old highlights. It will depend on present-day form and fitness.

Both remain in the conversation, with captain Shubman Gill and others indicating as much. The harder question is whether they can last that long.

For Rohit, who turns 39 on April 30, and Kohli, now 37, this IPL is a fitness test-cum batting examination. Both are now one-format cricketers. Both must show they can endure a long, high-intensity campaign and still be standing in 2027.

Fitness, though, is only half the issue. Form, that fickle friend, is the other. Ask any Indian cricketer what they fear most and the answer is simple: Being out of sight, out of mind. That is what makes this IPL so important for Rohit and Kohli. It puts them back in view after public attention was seized by the heroes of India's T20 World Cup triumph.

ODIs are increasingly rare. India last played a five-match ODI series in Feb-March 2019. For single-format players, one poor series can mean a long wait for another chance.

Those gaps hurt batters most: rhythm fades, match sharpness dulls and every failure feels terminal. For them, every substantial IPL innings will be read as evidence — or the lack of it — that Rohit and Kohli are still moving well, reacting sharply and carrying the intensity top-level ODI cricket demands. And unlike the IPL, ODIs offer no impact substitute, the ultimate safety valve for sluggish movers. It remains a seven-hour test of endurance.

Lazy analysis has caused us to hyphenate Rohit and Kohli's careers. Acronyms like the nauseating "Ro-Ko" have only reinforced that. Yet, the stakes are higher for Rohit. His ODI legacy is secure but age and role now sit at the heart of the debate, especially with younger opening options available alongside Gill that offer greater athletic value in the field. Fan armies have dressed up Rohit's loose dismissals as intent. His rollicking 20s and 30s were hailed as selflessness. But poor habits become more stubborn with age. They bled into his Test game too, accelerating both technical decline and his eventual exit from the format.

This IPL, selectors and coach Gautam Gambhir will watch him closely. Can Rohit start with intent, pull quality pace without losing shape, run hard, field efficiently and maintain acceptable fitness through a long campaign? He has crossed 500 runs in an IPL season only once, in 2013. Another middling season and quiet murmurs could metamorphose into harsh verdicts. His last three ODI scores, remember, were 3, 11 and 24. Kohli's case is different. He has been the defining white-ball batter of his generation and one of Indian sport's great athletic specimens. What he is chasing now is not excellence but sustained relevance.

Against South Africa and New Zealand, he showed greater willingness to attack early, looking for boundaries inside his first 10 balls. It suggested adaptation. Kohli had already mastered low-risk accumulation in ODIs; now he has garnished it with consistent urgency. That matters in the IPL, where strike rate and impact shape or destroy narratives. Kohli will want to show he can still dominate key bowlers and keep pace with the modern game's demands. If he can combine control with carnage, his case remains strong.

He has 11 IPL seasons of 400-plus runs and while many came at strike rates in the mid-120s, in each of his last three seasons it has risen to above 140. Last year, while batting first, his strike rate was 147.8, higher than his strike rate while chasing, 142.18. Since 2025, his ODI strike rate is 98.45, above his career mark of 93.41. Kohli also knows that when senior players try to stretch themselves into another World Cup cycle, selectors judge more than numbers. They look for hunger, energy and intent.

The IPL, played under relentless scrutiny and offering instant, unforgiving public judgment, is the perfect stage for such examinations. The league has increasingly become a selection filter across formats in India — sometimes, disturbingly, even for Tests. For Rohit and Kohli, this season is more than a tournament. It is their ticket to relevance.

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Revamped Knights ready for 'season of opportunities'

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Kolkata: The Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) go into a new IPL season with a number of new faces and also some holes to fill. Abhishek Nayar, who takes over as the side's new head coach after playing a big role looking after their academy, feels "it will be a season of opportunities" for both the support staff and players.

With a dressing room boasting Dwayne Bravo as 'mentor', Shane Watson as assistant coach and Tim Southee as bowling coach, along with the franchise's long-time finisher Andre Russell sitting in the dugout in a new role as 'power coach', Nayar feels his job is now easier. "For me, the designation has changed but the roles remains pretty similar. It's amazing to have such a leadership group.

"Both skipper Ajinkya (Rahane) and me will rely a lot on our whole support group to make sure that we can sort out the challenges throughout the season. The players are going to enjoy the luxury of having that much input in the dressing room," Nayar said.

The former Mumbai cricketer is happy with the form of the current crop of players but feels the team needs to get the combinations right. "The priority is making sure our combinations are working. Yes, everyone is in form but positioning them well enough is important," Nayar said.

With no Russell this time, Nayar felt players like Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh and others will get more opportunities. "Rinku has done it for India for many years. And Raman has done it for us in the season that we won the championship. So we are very hopeful they can replicate their performances," Nayar said.

Rana out for rest of season?

The team management said they were awaiting a medical update from the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru on key pacer Harshit Rana. "Once the medical team communicates to us, we'll let you know," Nayar said, adding, "It's not easy to replace Harshit Rana. But over the past few days, we've looked at a few bowlers."

Navdeep Saini, Akash Madhwal, Simarjeet Singh, Sandeep Warrier and KM Asif are some of the fast bowlers that KKR called up during their practice at the Eden Gardens this week. "Losing some of the key bowling options is not what you plan for but you have to accept," Bravo said, adding, "The good thing is that there's a lot of depth."

KKR are also waiting to hear on Lankan pacer Matheesha Pathirana's injury. "Pathirana is undergoing rehabilitation. He will undergo tests after that," Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said in a release.

Krishna Roy

KIWI POWER: KKR's top order batters (from left) Finn Allen, Rachin Ravindra and Tim Seifert during training in Kolkata on Friday

"The beauty of this KKR squad is the amount of incredible, world-class batting options that we have this season. It's an abundance of riches with the calibre of players we have. However, where they will all fit in, that's going to be a challenge for the leaders of this organisation, to be able to try and get those combinations as right as we possibly can from the first game. Then, we can make the little adjustments that will be needed throughout the tournament. We've got some serious hitting power and a great blend of experience and youthful energy."

— Shane Watson | KKR ASSISTANT COACH

'Bharat Arun adds value to our attack'

Lucknow: Bowling has been Lucknow Super Giants' weak link in the past but the addition of former India bowling coach Bharat Arun to the support staff has helped the franchise strengthen that department, skipper Rishabh Pant has said. Pant is eyeing an improved performance in IPL-2026 after a disappointing last season.

PANT

Speaking on JioStar, Pant shared his thoughts on how the addition of Arun has been beneficial for the younger crop of LSG fast bowlers.

"The camp with the fast bowlers has been fantastic. Bharat Arun sir has come on board and since he arrived, he has been adding a lot of value. We've had a lot of conversations about what I want from the bowlers and what he thinks he can add. The energy is pure," Pant said.

"He (Arun) is one of the best bowling coaches and I have that trust, having worked with him when he was with the Indian cricket team. He brings that experience. The bowlers trust and open up to him, which is exactly what you want from a bowling coach, adding value to the system," Pant added. PTI

THE LSG SWOT

Having strengthened their bowling attack at the auction, Lucknow Super Giants look more balanced. The onus is now on the players to translate potential into performance...

Strength: Explosive batting lineup. Mitchell Marsh, Aiden Markram, Rishabh Pant, Nicholas Pooran and Josh Inglis all have the potential to decimate opposition bowlers. Can they scale 'Mount 300' this season? Team also looks capable of chasing down daunting targets.

Weakness: Lack of a designated finisher. The team management gambled by investing in big-hitting Mukul Choudhary (Rs 2.6 cr) but it remains to be seen whether the Rajasthan cricketer can perform on the big stage. If not, Ayush Badoni and Abdul Samad will be expected to pick up the slack.

Opportunity: Big stars must come together as a unit to erase memories of two consecutive seventh-place finishes. For that to happen, Rishabh Pant the leader has to come to the party.

Threat: Pace attack looks menacing but is also vulnerable. Mohammed Shami, Anrich Nortje, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan all tend to be in the casualty ward far too often. Concerns remain over Wanindu Hasaranga, who was ruled out of the T20 World Cup due to a hamstring injury. The bowling group also lacks a good death bowler who can consistently bowl yorkers or come up with clever changes in pace and length.

—Text: **Prasanth Menon**

'Fresh start' for fit-again Shreyas Iyer

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Chandigarh: Punjab Kings skipper Shreyas Iyer has opened up on the arduous journey back to full fitness after his injury in Australia, shedding light on the physical and mental challenges he has faced in recent months. Iyer suffered a serious spleen laceration, with internal bleeding, after diving to catch a ball in the 3rd ODI against Australia on Oct 25, 2025 in Sydney. He was admitted to the ICU due to a rapid drop in vitals and discharged after treatment on Nov 1, 2025.

The batter revealed that he lost nearly seven kilograms in the aftermath of the injury, which he described as severe and demanding. "It took me close to two months just to get back in good physical condition," Iyer said. He added that regaining the lost weight was no easy task either, requiring focused effort and strict routines.

Iyer underwent multiple fitness tests before being cleared to return, a process he said tested not just his body but also his mindset. "I love challenges. Every season is a fresh start," he said.

Punjab Kings lost in the IPL final to RCB last season.

'Top Oz pacers to miss start of IPL'

Mitchell Starc (from left), Cummins & Hazlewood

Melbourne: Four leading Australian pacers, including Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, are set to miss the start of the upcoming IPL season, dealing an early setback to their respective franchises.

According to a report in cricket.com.au, Starc, Cummins and Hazlewood will miss at least the start of IPL while Nathan Ellis is set to be ruled out of the tournament completely. The report said Cricket Australia (CA) is taking a cautious approach with their pacers ahead a busy schedule from Aug, including 21 Tests in a 12-month period. Australia will tour South Africa, India and England before defending the ODI World Cup title in 2027.

Starc played all five Ashes Tests and the backend of the Big Bash League but not the T20 World Cup as he has retired from the format. Australia selector Tony Dodemaide had said that Cummins and Hazlewood's availability for the IPL purely was a "timing issue".

Cummins is the captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad while Starc plays for Delhi Capitals and Hazlewood for Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Groin injury rules Sam Curran out

Jaipur: Allrounder Sam Curran is set to miss the entire season for Rajasthan Royals due to a suspected groin injury. Curran, who was part of England's T20 World Cup side, was traded by Chennai Super Kings to Rajasthan Royals last year along with Ravindra Jadeja in exchange for Sanju Samson.

SRH's Jack Edwards also out

Australian allrounder Jack Edwards has also been ruled out of the IPL with a foot injury. The 25-year-old seam-bowling allrounder was picked up by SRH for Rs 3 cr. He was the only uncapped overseas player to be signed up at the auction. AGENCIES

SNAP SHOTS

Mumbai beat Bagan to go top

Mumbai City FC sneaked past Mohun Bagan Super Giant by a solitary goal at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata on Friday. The visitors leapfrogged their rivals and claimed the top spot in the Indian Super League table. Noufal PN.scored the winner in the 27th minute. In another match, Odisha FC beat Northeast United FC 4-1 in Guwahati. Rahul KP got a brace.

Tanvi enters semis: Tanvi Sharma stunned Japan's sixth seed Natsuki Nidaira in straight games to storm into the semi-finals of Orleans Masters Super 300 badminton tournament on Friday. The 17-year-old won 21-14, 21-14 in 43 minutes. Isharani Baruah emerged winner in another quarterfinals after Malvika Bansod retired while lagging 9-21 7-15 in an all Indian clash

India to host World Indoor Athletics C'ships: India will host the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the first time in 2028 in Bhubaneswar as the international body on Thursday awarded the hosting rights to the country at its council meeting in Torun, Poland.

Ridhima triumphs: Gritty Ridhima Dilawari rallied from a bogey-bogey start to fire her third straight round of 71 and win the sixth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour in Noida on Friday.

Hitaashee best among Indians: Hitaashee Bakshi was the best Indian player on the second day as she moved to the top 10 at the Australian WPGA Championships after carding a 3-under 68 that placed her tied eighth, in Gold Coast on Friday. Diksha Dagar kept herself within top-20 despite a card of 1-over 72. She is tied-16th. Also making the cut was Pranavi Urs (72-72) and she was tied-60th on the cutline.

Aditi starts slow: India's Aditi Ashok opened her campaign at the Fortinet Founders Cup with an even-par 72 to be placed tied 60th in Menlo Park.

Anahat, Tanvi advance: Top seed Anahat Singh and unseeded compatriot Tanvi Khanna ensured a strong Indian presence in the women's singles semifinals of the Indian Open after winning their quarterfinal matches in Mumbai on Friday.

FIFA fines Israeli FA: FIFA fined the Israeli Football Association (IFA) 150,000 Swiss francs for "multiple breaches" of its anti-discrimination obligations. A report by the disciplinary committee of FIFA found the IFA "failed to take meaningful action against Beitar Jerusalem" for "persistent and well-documented racist behaviour".

Linette stuns Swiatek

Iga Swiatek crashed out of the Miami Open second round on Thursday as 50th-ranked fellow Pole **Magda Linette** fought back for a 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over the six-time Grand Slam champion.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Swiatek, who won the Miami Open in 2022, suffered her first opening loss at a tournament since the 2021 WTA Finals.

It's just the latest disappointment for Swiatek, who was eliminated in the quarterfinals at the Australian Open and in the WTA 1000 events in Doha and Indian Wells. Swiatek's compatriot Linette had to dig deep after Swiatek — who won their last encounter 6-1, 6-1 — raced through the opening set in 33 minutes.

But she stuck to her guns and Swiatek double-faulted to give Linette two break points in the 12th game of the second set, Linette forcing a third set with a return winner. Linette advanced to a third-round matchup against 20-year-old Alexandra Eala of the Philippines, a 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-3 winner over Germany's Laura Siegemund.

Former world number one Venus Williams, 45, lost her first-round match to Britain's Francesca Jones 7-5, 7-5 after one hour and 51 minutes.

TENNIS ROUND-UP

FONSECA BOOKS ALCARAZ CLASH

On the men's side 19-year-old Brazilian Joao Fonseca outlasted Hungary's Fabian Marozsan 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, to book a second-round match with world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

Fonseca, ranked 39th, was strongly backed by Brazilian fans as he booked a first-ever meeting with Alcaraz and his second marquee contest in as many tournaments after falling to Jannik Sinner at Indian Wells last week.

French 17-year-old Moise Kouame beat qualifier Zachary Svajda 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 to become the youngest player to claim an ATP Masters 1000 victory since Rafa Nadal in Hamburg in 2003. Kouame, who received a wild card invitation, next faces 21st seed Jiri Lehecka of Czech Republic. AFP

Cambiaghi's late show sinks Roma; Villa win

Rome: Bologna advanced to the Europa League quarterfinals on Thursday after **Nicolo Cambiaghi** struck late in extra time to secure a 4-3 second-leg win at AS Roma and a 5-4 aggregate victory. Aston Villa also progressed, beating Lille 2-0 at Villa Park to complete a comfortable 3-0 aggregate success, while Real Betis and FC Porto cruised through with commanding overall wins.

Bologna took the lead in Rome when Jonathan Rowe fired home in the 22nd minute after being set up by Santiago Castro, but Roma drew level 10 minutes later as Evan Ndicka powered in a header from a corner.

FOOTBALL WRAP

The visitors restored their aggregate advantage before halftime through a Federico Bernardeschi penalty, awarded after Stephan El Shaarawy fouled Nadir Zortea, and Castro made it 3-1 on the night shortly after the break. Roma mounted a late fightback as Donyell Malen converted a penalty in the 69th minute following Remo Freuler's foul on Robinio Vaz, before captain Lorenzo Pellegrini struck 10 minutes from time to force extra time.

The tie was settled in the second period of extra time when Cambiaghi found space in the area and drove a low shot past the goalkeeper to seal Bologna's progress.

In England, Aston Villa were rarely troubled as they protected their first-leg advantage before taking control after the break. Captain John McGinn opened the scoring in the 54th minute with a clinical finish on the counter-attack, and Leon Bailey rolled the ball into an empty net four minutes from time to confirm Villa's third successive European quarterfinal appearance.

Select results: Midtjylland 1 (Erlic 69) lost to Nottingham Forest 2 (Dominguez 40, Yates 52); Lyon 0 lost to Celta Vigo 2 (Rueda 61, Jutgla 90+2); Aston Villa 2 (McGinn 54, Bailey 86) bt Lille 0; Porto 2 (William Gomes 21, Froholdt 72) bt Stuttgart 0; Real Betis 4 (Aitor Ruibal 8, Amrabat 45+1, Cucho Hernandez 53, Antony 66) bt Panathinaikos (GRE) 0; Roma 3 (NDicka 32, Malen 69-pen, Pellegrini 80) lost to Bologna 4 (Rowe 22, Bernardeschi 45+2-pen, Castro 58, Cambiaghi 111).

BIG GUNS MARCH ON

Barcelona hit Newcastle United for seven to reach the Champions League quarterfinals on Wednesday, while Liverpool overturned a first-leg deficit to beat Galatasaray in their last-16 tie and both Bayern Munich and Atletico Madrid advanced to the next round.

Liverpool were too good for Galatasaray, overturning a 1-0 first-leg deficit against the Turkish side with a comprehensive 4-0 win at Anfield.

Results: Barcelona 7 (Raphinha 6, 72, Bernal 18, Yamal 45+7-pen, Lopez 51, Lewandowski 56, 61) bt Newcastle United 2 (Elanga 15, 28); Liverpool 4 (Szoboszlai 25, Ekitike 51, Gravenberch 53, Salah 62) bt Galatasaray 0; Bayern Munich 4 (Kane 25-pen, 54, Karl 56, Diaz 70) bt Atalanta 1 (Samardzic 85); Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Kolo Muani 30, Simons 52, 90-pen) bt Atletico Madrid (ESP) 2 (Alvarez 47, Hancko 75). AFP

Ferguson, Latham shine in NZ victory

Auckland: A miserly bowling display from Lockie Ferguson and an unbeaten half-century from Tom Latham helped New Zealand beat South Africa by eight wickets to take a 2-1 lead in the series here on Friday.

Brief scores: New Zealand 137/2 in 16.2 overs (T Latham 63*, D Conway 39) **bt South Africa 136/9** (N Mokoena 26, G Linde 17; Mitchell Santner 2-21).

INDIA WOMEN TO PLAY ONE-OFF TEST, THREE ODIS IN SOUTH AFRICA IN DEC

The Indian women's team will play a one-off Test during its tour of South Africa later this year, which will also feature a three-match ODI series, Cricket South Africa (CSA) said on Friday. The Test will be held in Gqeberha from Dec 20 to 23.

GALLERY

INDIA TO PLAY T20IS IN IRELAND

Team India will tour Ireland to play two T20Is in the last week of June, **reports Gaurav Gupta.** This will be India's T20 team's first outing since it clinched the 2026 T20 World Cup under Suryakumar Yadav's captaincy.

LS RETIRES AS COMMENTATOR, ALLEGES BIAS

Former India leg-spinner Laxman Sivaramakrishnan announced his retirement from the BCCI commentary panel, citing lack of opportunities to conduct toss and presentation ceremonies as reasons to end his broadcasting career. "If I have not been used for tosses and presentation for 23 years, and newcomers come in (and) do pitch report and toss presentation even when Shastri was coaching, what do you think could be the reason," he posted on social media. Replying to a comment on whether his skin colour could be an issue, he replied, "You are right. Colour discrimination." Siva played nine Tests and 16 ODIs. TNN & AGENCIES

TOISA to honour the best in Indian sport

UP CM Yogi Adityanath To Felicitate Players, Teams Of The Year Picked Over 45 Categories

Shalabh.Saxena
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Getty Images

TOAST OF A NATION: The women's team's ODI World Cup victory was the high point for Indian sport in 2025

Lucknow: The biggest names in Indian sport will once again gather under one roof as the much-anticipated Times of India Sports Awards (TOISA) returns to Lucknow for the third consecutive time on Saturday, celebrating the inspiring journeys and achievements of the country's finest athletes across multiple disciplines.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath will grace the occasion as guest and hand over the trophies honouring achievers and emerging stars who made the nation proud over the past year.

The event will be attended by sporting legends like PT Usha, Leander Paes, Mithali Raj, Madan Lal, Sandeep Patil and Sardar Singh and other top athletes, coaches, administrators and guests from across the country, making it one of the most prestigious sporting evenings of the year.

This edition of the TOISA will recognise athletes across more than 45 categories, honouring performances during the Jan 1 to Dec 31, 2025 evaluation period. The wide range of categories ensures that excellence across mainstream as well as emerging sports disciplines is duly acknowledged.

Having begun in 2015, the TOISA completes a decade and a special section will honour best players of the past 10 years. Besides, there will be a special segment on best player of the year from UP.

For the last decade, the para players have shown their mettle on fields and courts, bringing several laurels to the nation. To felicitate their talent, TOISA has 13 categories dedicated to para sports.

A distinguished jury comprising eminent Indian sporting personalities — Abhinav Bindra, the country's first individual Olympic gold medallist, tennis legend and Olympic medallist Leander Paes, PR Sreejesh, a two-time Olympic medallist, Devendra Jhajharia, a two-time Paralympic gold medallist, Mithali Raj, one of the greatest names in women's cricket with over 10,000 international runs, and Sharath Kamal, India's most decorated table tennis player with 13 Commonwealth Games medals — will select the winners.

The jury faces a tough task in choosing from a star-studded list of nominees, as the past year witnessed several landmark achievements. Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra continued his remarkable run on the global stage with outstanding performances in the Diamond League, while shooter Samrat Rana clinched three medals, including two golds, at the World Shooting Championships held in Cairo, Egypt.

Lakshya Sen has been one of India's top performers in badminton for quite some time now. He recently contested the final of the All England Championships. The young shuttler is cruising towards etching his name among the game's elite.

Indian cricket also enjoyed a historic year. The India women's national cricket team lifted their maiden ICC women's cricket World Cup title on home soil, while the India men's team captured both the ICC Champions Trophy and the Asia Cup.

Smriti Mandhana's World Cup-winning feat and her own performance were exceptional this year. She played a pivotal role in India's historic win, scoring 434 runs overall, the maximum by any player. The Indian vice-captain scored a blistering 109-run innings against New Zealand and an 80-run innings against Australia, along with a crucial 45 runs in the final against the South African team.

Another peach of a performance came from our very own Deepti Sharma. This Agra girl's all-round performance bagged her the Player of the Tournament award as well.

In another remarkable feat, the India women's blind cricket team became the first-ever champions of the Women's Blind Cricket T20 World Cup.

Beyond cricket, the India men's hockey team triumphed at the Asia Cup, securing qualification for the 2026 FIH World Cup. Indian para-athletes also shone brightly at the World Para Athletics Championships, returning with a rich haul.

Promising athletes like Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in cricket, Divya Deshmukh in chess, and Tanvi Sharma in badminton emerged as stars of the future.

Through these honours, TOISA continues its mission of celebrating India's sporting heroes, whose grit, dedication and excellence inspire India.

TOISA NOMINATIONS

Here are the nominees shortlisted for various categories by the illustrious TOISA jury, which includes icons like Abhinav Bindra, Mithali Raj and Leander Paes...

BADMINTON (MALE)
Lakshya Sen, Ayush Shetty, Kiran George, Chirag Shetty, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy

BADMINTON (FEMALE)
Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, Tressa Jolly, Gayatri Gopichand

CRICKET (MALE)
Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, Ravindra Jadeja, KL Rahul, Varun Chakravarthy, Kuldeep Yadav

CRICKET (FEMALE)
Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Shafali Verma

ATHLETICS (MALE)
Neeraj Chopra, Animesh Kujur, Gulveer Singh, Sachin Yadav

ATHLETICS (FEMALE)
Parul Chaudhary, Rupal Chaudhary, Jyothi Yarraji, Pooja Singh

EQUESTRIAN
Ashish Limaye, Shruti Vora, Divyakriti Singh

HOCKEY (MALE)
Abhishek Nain, Harmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Amit Rohidas

HOCKEY (FEMALE)
Udita Duhan, Navneet Kaur, Mumtaz Khan, Rutuja Pisal

SHOOTING (MALE)
Samrat Rana, Ravinder Singh, Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar, Anish, Varun Tomar, Rudrankksh Patil

SHOOTING (FEMALE)
Suruchi Inder Singh, Simranpreet Kaur, Esha Singh, Elavenil Valarivan, Sift Kaur Samra, Manu Bhaker

CHESS (MALE)
R Praggnanandhaa, Aravindh Chithambaram, P Iniyan, Nihal Sarin, Arjun Erigaisi

CHESS (FEMALE)
Divya Deshmukh, Koneru Humpy, R Vaishali, Nandhidhaa PV

ARCHERY (MALE)
Dhiraj Bommadevara, Abhishek Verma, Atanu Das, Prathamesh Fuge, Rishabh Yadav

ARCHERY (FEMALE)
Ankita Bhakat, Jyothi Surekha, Deepika Kumari, Prithika Pradeep

BILLIARDS/SNOOKER
Pankaj Advani, Aditya Mehta, Brijesh Damani

WEIGHTLIFTING (MALE)
Rishikanta Singh, Muthupandi Raja, Dilbag Singh, Lovepreet Singh

WEIGHTLIFTING (FEMALE)
Mirabai Chanu, Mehak Sharma, Bindyarani Devi

WRESTLING (MALE)
Sunil Kumar, Nitesh, Aman Sehrawat, Sujeet Kalkal

WRESTLING (FEMALE)
Antim Panghal, Manisha, Nisha Dahiya

SQUASH (MALE)
Abhay Singh, Saurav Ghosal, Velavan Senthilkumar, Mahesh Mangaonkar

SQUASH (FEMALE)
Anahat Singh, Joshna Chinappa, Dipika Pallikal Karthik, Tanvi Khanna

TABLE TENNIS (MALE)
Manav Thakkar, Sathiyan Gnanasekaran, Harmeet Desai, Payas Jain

TABLE TENNIS (FEMALE)
Manika Batra, Sreeja Akula, Diya Chitale, Ayhika Mukherjee

TENNIS (MALE)
Rohan Bopanna, Yuki Bhambri, Sumit Nagal

TENNIS (FEMALE)
Ankita Raina, Vaishnavi Adkar, Sahaja Yamalapalli

FOOTBALL (MALE)
Subhasish Bose, Sunil Chhetri, Vishal Kaith, Brison Fernandes, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu

FOOTBALL (FEMALE)
Soumya Guguloth, Grace Dangmei, Elangbam Panthoi Chanu, Manisha Kalyan, Pyari Xaxa

KABADDI
Sanju Devi, Pawan Sehrawat, Ritu Negi, Arjun Deshwal

BOXING (MALE)
Sachin Siwach, Hitesh Gulia, Pawan Bartwal, Ankush Panghal

BOXING (FEMALE)
Minakshi Hooda, Jaismine Lamboria, Nikhat Zareen, Pooja Rani

SAILING
Vishnu Saravanan, Zahaan Hemrajani, Abhimanyu Panwar, Ghashiayah A

COACH OF THE YEAR
Amol Majumdar (Cricket), Suresh Singh (Shooting), Ashok Kumar Rana (Shooting)

PARA ARCHERY (MALE)
Harvinder Singh, Vivek Chikara, Rakesh Kumar, Shyam Sunder Swami

PARA ARCHERY (FEMALE)
Sheetal Devi, Payal Nag, Jyoti Baliyan

PARA ATHLETICS (MALE)
Sumit Antil, Shailesh Kumar, Sandeep Kumar, Nishad Kumar

PARA ATHLETICS (FEMALE)
Simran Sharma, Preethi Pal, Ekta Bhyan, Deepthi Jeevanji

PARA BADMINTON (MALE)
Pramod Bhagat, Sukant Kadam, Krishna Nagar

PARA BADMINTON (FEMALE)
Mandeep Kaur, Manasi Joshi, Nithya Sre

PARA CHESS
Vaibhav Gautam, Samarth J Rao, Venkata Krishna Karthik K

PARA JUDO
Kapil Parmar, Avidha Sharma, Rahul Rajora, Kokila

PARA SHOOTING (MALE)
Bhat Amir Ahmad, Nihal Singh, Sandeep Kumar, Rudransh Khandelwal

PARA SHOOTING (FEMALE)
Mona Agarwal, Avani Lekhara, Rubi Kumari

EMERGING SPORTSPERSON
Tanvi Sharma (Badminton), Divya Deshmukh (Chess), Shree Charani (Cricket), Vaibhav Suryavanshi (Cricket)

PARA SPORTSPERSON OF THE YEAR
Sheetal Devi (Para Archery), Praveen Kumar (Para Athletics – High Jump), Preethi Pal (Para Athletics – Sprint), Sumit Antil (Para Athletics – Javelin)

PARA COACH OF THE YEAR
Dr. Satyapal Singh (Para Athletics), Subhash Rana (Para Shooting), Gaurav Khanna (Para Badminton), Sandhya Bharti (Para Taekwondo)

TEAM OF THE YEAR
India Women's Cricket Team, India Men's Cricket Team, India Men's Hockey Team, India Men's & Women's Kabaddi Teams, India National Shooting Team, India Women's Cricket Team for the Blind, India Squash Team, India Women's Ice Hockey Team

MEET THE JURY

Ahead of TOISA, here are members of the eminent jury...

ABHINAV BINDRA | SHOOTING
India's first individual Olympic gold medalist, Abhinav Bindra is one of the country's most celebrated sportspersons. At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Bindra created history by winning gold in the 10m air rifle. He was also the first Indian to win a world title at the 2006 World Shooting Championships and has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna and the Arjuna Award.

PR SREEJESH | HOCKEY
One of the finest goalkeepers in modern hockey, PR Sreejesh played a key role in India's resurgence on the global stage, helping India win Olympic bronze medals at the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Olympics. An Asian Games gold medallist, Sreejesh has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna and the Arjuna Award.

DEVENDRA JHAJHARIA | PARA ATHLETICS
Devendra Jhajharia is the only Indian to win two Paralympic gold medals in javelin throw, at the 2004 Athens and 2016 Rio Paralympics. He also secured silver at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics, completing a rare hat-trick of medals. Jhajharia is the first para-athlete to receive the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna. His honours also include the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri and Arjuna Award.

SHARATH KAMAL | TABLE TENNIS
Achanta Sharath Kamal is widely regarded as India's greatest table tennis player. The first Indian to win a Commonwealth Games singles gold in 2006, he has since amassed a record 13 Commonwealth Games medals. A 10-time national champion, he has also won medals at the Asian Games and Asian Championships. Sharath represented India at five Olympic Games from Athens 2004 to Paris 2024 and has been awarded the Padma Shri, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna and the Arjuna Award.

MITHALI RAJ | CRICKET
A trailblazer in women's cricket, Mithali Raj is the highest run-scorer in women's international cricket with 10,868 runs. She amassed 7,805 runs in ODIs, the most by any woman, and led India to two ICC Women's Cricket World Cup finals in 2005 and 2017. Mithali's remarkable 20-year career earned her the Padma Shri, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna, Arjuna Award and recognition as the Wisden Leading Woman Cricketer in 2017.

LEANDER PAES | TENNIS
With 18 Grand Slam doubles titles, Leander Paes is a towering figure in Indian sport. He won a historic bronze at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, ending India's 44-year wait for an individual medal. Paes also holds the record for the most doubles victories in Davis Cup history and has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, Arjuna Award and Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna.

BOWLERS POWER CANARA BANK

Bengaluru: Left-arm spinner Shreesha Achar (4/18) and young medium pacer Rajvir Wadhwa (3/15) shared seven wickets between them to power Canara Bank to an eight-wicket win over AGO Recreation Club in the KSCA group II (I division) league cum knockout tournament. AGORC were bowled out for 108, and Canara Bank overhauled the target in 15.4 overs.

KSCA TOURNEY

Invited to bat, AGORC lost their way early, losing four wickets within the powerplay. After Wadhwa sent back the top order in the company of Lavish Kaushal, Achar ran through the middle and lower order. In reply, Canara Bank rode on MG Naveen's unbeaten 50 for a comprehensive win.

Brief scores: AGO Recreation Club: 108 all out in 16.1 overs (Sharath BR 62; Rajvir Wadhwa 3-15, Shreesha Achar 4-18) lost to **Canara Bank: 112/2 in 15.4 overs** (Naveen MG 50 n.o.; Siddharth 37 n.o.). TNN

Big Bay best

Mumbai: Mallesh Narredu-trained Big Bay is fancied to win the Free Press Journal Trophy, the feature event of the races run over a sprint here on Saturday.

1. Mid - Day Trophy 2000M: Bright Button 1, Manwar 2. **2. Racingpulse.In Trophy 1400M:** Youremyeyesbaby 1, Red Rose 2. **3.**

SELECTIONS

Indiarace.com Trophy 1200M: Organised Chaos 1, Paloma 2. **4. Race Mirror Trophy 1200M:** Key West 1, Aeon Flux 2. **5. Hindu Trophy 1400M:** Vegatha 1, Matisse 2. **6. Free Press Journal Trophy 1200M:** Big Bay 1, Scaramouche 2. **7. Times Of India Trophy 1000M:** Desert Classic 1, House Of Lords 2. **Day's best:** Organised Chaos. **Jackpot:** 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7; **Treble:** 4, 5 & 6. TNN

Karnataka enter final

ONE-DAY TROPHY

Bengaluru: Karnataka continued their fine run in the BCCI U-23 Women's One-Day Trophy and sealed their place in the final. On Friday, they registered an eight-wicket win over Mumbai in the semi-finals in Ranchi.

Invited to bat, Mumbai failed to stitch a partnership as the Karnataka bowlers kept chipping away at their line-up. Spinner Saloni P caused the maximum damage, returning figures of 4 for 20, while BG Tejashwini accounted for three wickets.

In reply, Karnataka suffered an early setback, losing two wickets by the fourth over. While opener Rachitha Hatwar offered stability, Niki Prasad (49 n.o) and Soumya Verma (45 n.o) completed the formalities with an unconquered 65-run third wicket partnership.

Karnataka, who defeated Uttarakhand by 42 wickets in the quarterfinals earlier in the week, will face Maharashtra in the final on Sunday.

Brief scores: Semifinals: Mumbai: 134 all out in 41.3 overs (Yayati 31; BG Tejashwini 3-30, Saloni P 4-20) lost to **Karnataka: 135/3 in 25.5 overs** (Rachitha Hatwar 36, Niki Prasad 49 n.o, Soumya Verma 45 n.o; Zeal D'mello 2-24).

Quarterfinals: Karnataka: 221 all out in 49.2 overs (Rachitha 29, Krishika Reddy 31, Chandasi Krishnamurthy 45, Shreya Chavan 50; Nisha Mishra 2-41, Kanika 2-38, Kalpana Verma 3-42, Sabhya 2-34) bt **Uttarakhand: 180 all out in 48.3 overs** (Kalpana Verma 41n.o, Kanika 35, Tejashwini 2-20, Niki 2-32, Saloni P 4-18). TNN

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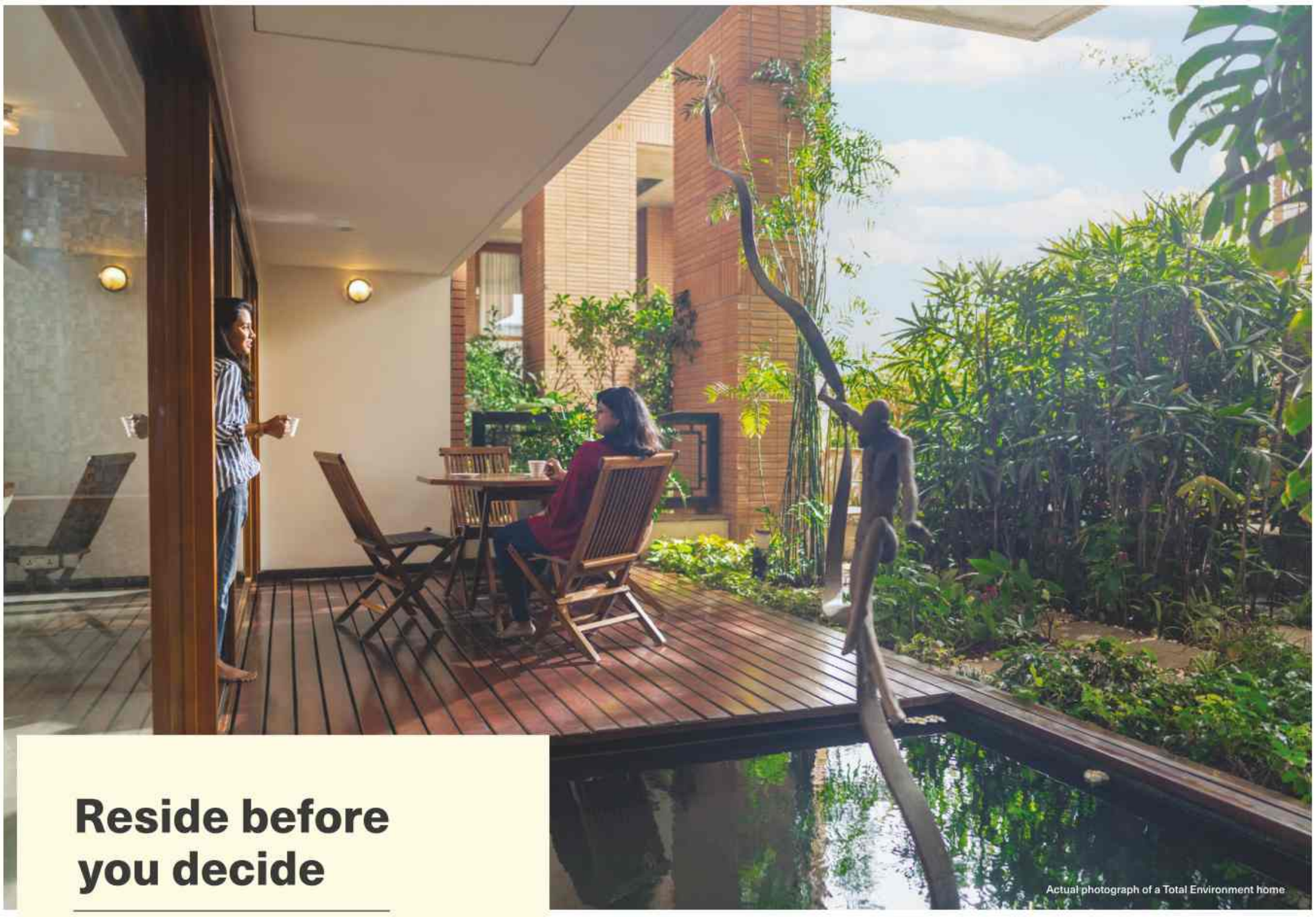
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